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SERMONS

PREACHED BEFORE

THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD,

IN THE YEAR MDCCCVI.

AT

THE LECTURE

FOUNDED BY

THE REV. JOHN BAMPTON, M. A.

LATE CANON OF SALISBURY.

BY

JOHN BROWNE, M. A.

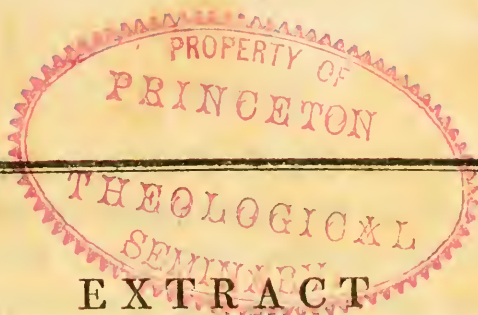
LATE FELLOW OF C. C. C.

OXFORD,

AT THE UNIVERSITY PRESS FOR THE AUTHOR:

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1809.



FROM THE
LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT
OF THE LATE
REV. JOHN BAMPTON,
CANON OF SALISBURY

—“ I give and bequeath my Lands and
“ Estates to the Chancellor, Masters, and Scholars
“ of the Univerſity of Oxford for ever, to have
“ and to hold all and ſingular the ſaid Lands or
“ Eſtates upon truſt, and to the intents and pur-
“ poſes hereinafter mentioned; that is to ſay, I
“ will and appoint that the Vice-Chancellor of
“ the Univerſity of Oxford for the time being ſhall
“ take and receive all the rents, iſſues, and pro-
“ fits thereof, and (after all taxes, reparations, and
“ neceſſary deductions made) that he pay all the
“ remainder to the endowment of eight Divinity
“ Lecture Sermons, to be eſtabliſhed for ever in
“ the ſaid Univerſity, and to be performed in the
“ manner following :

“ I direct and appoint, that, upon the firſt
“ Tueſday in Eaſter Term, a Lecturer be yearly
“ choſen

“ chosen by the Heads of Colleges only, and by
 “ no others, in the room adjoining to the Print-
 “ ing-House, between the hours of ten in the
 “ morning and two in the afternoon, to preach
 “ eight Divinity Lecture Sermons, the year fol-
 “ lowing, at St. Mary’s in Oxford, between the
 “ commencement of the last month in Lent Term,
 “ and the end of the third week in Act Term.

“ Also I direct and appoint, that the eight Di-
 “ vinity Lecture Sermons shall be preached upon
 “ either of the following Subjects—to confirm
 “ and establish the Christian Faith, and to con-
 “ fute all heretics and schismatics—upon the di-
 “ vine authority of the holy Scriptures—upon
 “ the authority of the writings of the primitive
 “ Fathers, as to the faith and practice of the pri-
 “ mitive Church—upon the Divinity of our
 “ Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ—upon the Di-
 “ vinity of the Holy Ghost—upon the Articles
 “ of the Christian Faith, as comprehended in the
 “ Apostles’ and Nicene Creeds.

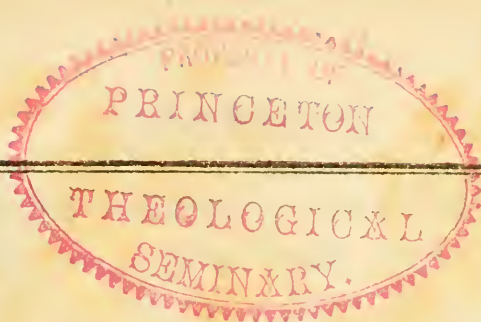
“ Also I direct, that thirty copies of the eight
 “ Divinity Lecture Sermons shall be always
 “ printed, within two months after they are
 “ preached, and one copy shall be given to the
 “ Chancellor of the University, and one copy to
 “ the Head of every College, and one copy to the
 “ Mayor of the city of Oxford, and one copy to
 “ be put into the Bodleian Library ; and the ex-
 “ pence

“ pence of printing them shall be paid out of the
 “ revenue of the Land or Estates given for esta-
 “ blishing the Divinity Lecture Sermons ; and
 “ the Preacher shall not be paid, nor be entitled
 “ to the revenue, before they are printed.

“ Also I direct and appoint, that no person
 “ shall be qualified to preach the Divinity Lec-
 “ ture Sermons, unless he hath taken the Degree
 “ of Master of Arts at least, in one of the two
 “ Universities of Oxford or Cambridge; and that
 “ the same person shall never preach the Divi-
 “ nity Lecture Sermons twice.”

ADVERTISEMENT.

MUCH and severe illness is the only apology which the Author has to offer for the late appearance of these Lectures : but he is justly apprehensive that the same apology will not be admitted for the imperfect state in which they are now presented to the public.



SERMON I.

REV. i. 8.

*I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending,
saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is
to come, the Almighty.*

THESE words have been usually produced as a striking and irrefragable proof of the eternity, and consequently the divinity of the person of Jesus Christ. They are evidently spoken by him, and of himself, and their meaning is so obvious, and at the same time so direct to this point, that every dispassionate and unprejudiced enquirer must, on reading them, feel their force, and acquiesce in their testimony. “I cannot forbear recording it,” says a dissenting Divine, eminent for his candour and erudition, “that this text has done more than any other in

“ the Bible towards preventing me from
“ giving into that scheme which would
“ make our Lord Jesus Christ no more than
“ a deified creature.” Indeed it is difficult
to conceive how any religious system, which
derogates from the eternal glory and god-
head of our blessed Redeemer, can stand for
a moment before so plain and authoritative
a declaration of holy Scripture. The Soci-
nian writers have in general either avoided
taking any notice of the passage at all ; or,
when it has been urged against them, have
refused to understand it in its most literal
and legitimate sense, but have attempted to
fix a new meaning upon it, less contradic-
tory to their own preconceived opinions ;
and some few, more adventurous than their
fellows, have gone the daring length of de-
nying the genuineness of the book in which
it is to be found.

Again, they are used to denote the infinite
duration of the kingdom of Christ, confi-
dered in his peculiar character of the Re-
deemer of mankind. All power over this
world, together with the inhabitants there-
of, was given to him, whilst it existed only

as

as an idea (so to speak) in the Divine mind, and he will continue to exert this power to all eternity. The context more particularly points to that tremendous exercise of the kingly authority of Christ, when he shall come in his glory to judge the world at the last day. The text is therefore a preparatory declaration of his ability in that day to reward his faithful subjects, and to punish the disobedient and rebellious.

Thirdly, these words have been made use of to illustrate the general uniformity and consistence of the Divine government. Christ the power, the wisdom, and the goodness of God, is from everlasting to everlasting. These attributes have been invariably exercised since the beginning of the world for the improvement and the happiness of mankind; in a way most consistent with themselves, most suitable to the peculiar circumstances of the human race, and most conducive to the furtherance of the purposes of God, when he first called man into existence. Whatsoever is done on earth, he doeth it himself. All his dealings with his creatures, however various they

might be in their manner and circumstances, yet as proceeding from him “who changeth not,” who is “Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending,” are referable to one fixed and immutable principle, and directed to the same beneficial end. He *was* in the Patriarchal and Mosaic revelations; he *is* in the Christian; he *will be* in every future dispensation of grace and mercy to the final consummation of all things.

These three several applications of this interesting passage are neither contradictory to, nor indeed much different from, one another. They easily unite, and flow towards the same point. For if we believe in the eternity of the person of Jesus Christ, it will readily follow, that his kingdom also over his creatures endureth for ever, and that the government of his kingdom is ever uniform and consistent, as being administered by that unchangeable Wisdom, which seeth and knoweth all things, to which the past and the future are as the present; by that Goodness which has an universe for its sphere of action, and that Power which nothing in heaven or in earth can withstand.

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When we survey the works of God in the visible creation, our attention is immediately and forcibly arrested by the vast variety of scenes which nature presents to our view. We behold matter infinitely diversified as to form, and endued with various powers, from man, who connects the material with the spiritual world, down to that class of beings which indistinctly marks the transition from animal to vegetable life. On observing more accurately the several functions of the different orders of creatures, we perceive them all harmonizing to one great end, the general good of the whole; an end which demonstrates that all things are ordered by an infinitely wise Intelligence. Thus we see the wisdom of the Creator exhibited in various manners; its appearances are diversified, but it is the diversity of wisdom. Amid the endless variety of the Creator's works, the different manners in which he has treated the several objects of his creation, the different powers with which he has entrusted them, and the different laws by which he has willed their energies to be restrained—every thing is administered according to the most

perfect order and consistency : the harmony of his operations is never for a moment interrupted ; and, however dissimilar in other respects, bear equally impressed upon them the stamp of perfect and infinite wisdom. So that whilst we exclaim with the Psalmist, “ O Lord, how manifold are thy works ! ” we are constrained with him also to acknowledge, “ in wisdom hast thou made “ them all.”

The same uniformity of wisdom, in as great a diversity of operation, must also characterize the Divine government, when exercised over the moral and political world. But the conclusion in this case does not open upon us so easily and directly as in the other : the means by which we arrive at it are less obvious and certain ; and our conviction is frequently less obvious and complete. The eye of the common observer may take in the beauty and order of the visible creation, and remark the traces of a wise and benevolent design so evident in every part of it. These are palpable things ; they stand prominent, and force themselves upon the notice of the most hasty and superficial

ficial enquirer. That a design equally wise and benevolent actuates the moral government of God, it were a want of piety to doubt : but this is in general only discoverable by long and painful investigation : it is seen less clearly and distinctly : in some cases and by many comprehensions it is not discoverable at all : and though we conclude that “ the Lord is righteous in all his ways, “ and holy in all his works,” yet in such instances the conclusion is drawn rather from the analogy of the natural world, than from any facts discoverable by us in the moral. Here, to the unenlightened reason of man, the greatest irregularities and disorders will appear to prevail. We shall discover, upon a cursory and confined view, very little of that harmony, and order, and consistence, which we are enjoined to connect with all the operations of the will and power of God. On the contrary, the history of mankind presents, with a continued picture of conflict and confusion, an unceasing repetition of struggle and opposition between principles apparently heterogeneous and hostile. We behold empires rising into height and splen-

dor, and again sinking into decay and ruin :
“ like waves in the ocean, they successively
“ rise and disappear ; one for a moment lifts
“ up its head and towers above the rest, but
“ is suddenly overwhelmed and absorbed by
“ the superior force of another, which per-
“ haps stays but for a short time, then falls,
“ and is seen no more.” And all this, to
mortal views, appears neither to proceed
from adequate causes, nor to have any ob-
vious tendency to ends worthy of the wis-
dom and goodness of Him who made and
who governs the universe.

At some particular periods, more especial-
ly those which it is the province of ancient
history to describe, the political state of the
world seems to be hastily verging to an uni-
versal monarchy : but these mighty empires,
which threaten to swallow up all the rest,
are suddenly broken to pieces themselves ;
and these changes are seldom or never ef-
fected without great and signal desolation,
nor usually unaccompanied with heavy and
lasting calamities : and the common reader,
on surveying the scene of havoc and destruc-
tion which the history of mankind presents
him

him with, the crimes which seem to be almost necessary to the erection of great and extensive empires, and the evils which for a time at least are the consequences of their dismemberment, will be inclined to consider the world, instead of being governed and directed by a supreme Intelligence, as being left rather to become the sport of the passions and caprices of men.

And as in the revolutions of states and empires, so in the less prominent and less striking features of the history of mankind, a distribution equally if not more confused and irregular is apparent. We continually mark the progress and the triumph of evil, we regret the late appearance, and, to our feeble comprehension, the scanty dispensation of good; and, in short, whoever surveys with merely human eyes the confusions and disorders of which the history as well as the life of man is so full, will be sometimes tempted to imagine either that the Deity is insensible to the miseries of his creatures, or, like the gods of Epicurus, he is totally indifferent to their moral conduct.

We read that Alphonso X. of Castile, who
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was a prince much addicted to the study of astronomy, at a time when the true system of the heavens was not at all understood, found himself so much embarrassed by the endless complications of the Ptolomaic Almagest, and so little able to reconcile the many contradictions between that and the visible order of the heavenly motions, that he presumptuously declared, “ had the Almighty consulted him before he laid the foundations of the universe, he could have taught him a much more simple and convenient mode of construction.” The childish arrogance and daring impiety of this speech are sufficiently evident and disgusting: and yet when men take upon themselves to arraign the moral government of God, on account of some irregularities and disorders which they seem to have discovered both in the manner and the measure of his dealings with mankind, their presumption will be found hardly inferior to that of Alphonso. He blindly transferred to the works of God those perplexities and contradictions which were alone chargeable upon his own imperfect views, and the erroneous system

system which then prevailed, and continued to prevail for a considerable time afterwards. Had he lived in times more favourable to the growth and cultivation of every branch of natural science, and had he been able to survey the simplicity and order of this part of the Almighty's works, as they are explained in a more excellent system, it is but common charity to hope that so daring a sentiment would never have escaped his lips, nor had place for a moment in his thoughts; that he would have been as pious and as humble, as he certainly shewed himself to be presumptuous and profane. And in like manner it requires the illumination of revealed wisdom to enable men to take in all the excellence and beauty of the moral distributions of God; otherwise they will appear to them as confused and disorderly as the Ptolomaic construction of the heavens did to him.

From the earliest periods of time, when the human mind, abstracted from the immediate cares and concerns of life, began to investigate theological questions, these apparent irregularities and disorders in the moral govern-

government of God have occasioned much perplexity and error. The common experience of men could not but assure them both of the existence and of the extensive prevalence of evil. The original idea of an almighty Creator had been handed down to them by tradition ; and to this it was easy and natural for them to add the ideas of supreme goodness and wisdom. But they could not look around them without observing a distribution more irregular than they could well connect with those ideas. Nor were they at any time without some notions, however vague and unrefined, of the essential and necessary difference of human actions, and of the unalterable obligation to do good, and to abstain from doing evil : and hence they were obviously led to hope that a corresponding difference would be made in the distribution of worldly pains and pleasures, according to the different character of men's moral conduct. But, on the contrary, they observed the good and the evil things of life to be indiscriminately scattered about without any direct and immediate reference to the merits or demerits of those

those to whose lot they fell: the rudest and most hasty sketch they could draw of human life, shewed them virtue languishing in a dungeon, and vice wantoning in the lap of prosperity, or seated on the throne of power. Mankind were as yet too much children in understanding to connect a wide and comprehensive survey of the purposes and operations of God: their attention was confined to the objects immediately before them, and according to the complexion of these, without going any farther, their conclusions were determined. It would have been to very little purpose to tell them, that the evils observable in the general appointment of worldly things were such in appearance only; that they were mercies in disguise, and that they were intended and really calculated to produce a greater portion of good than could, according to the established order of things, have been produced in any other manner. Such a doctrine would hardly have been intelligible to them; the evils of which they complained were immediate and sensible, but the good was remote and indistinct. From their notions of a future
state,

state, if any such they had, they might have concluded, that such a state was intended to rectify the disorders and irregularities of the present; to reward the sufferings of virtue upon the earth, and to punish the excesses of vice. But still this did not effectually remove every uneasy scruple of the speculative enquirer; and, to be completely satisfied, he had to learn a lesson which the mind of man was not then sufficiently strengthened to bear, the expedience and necessity of these seeming evils, their conformity to the wisdom of God, and their strict subservience to the eternal purposes of his goodness.

“ Shall a man receive good at the hands
“ of God, and shall he not receive evil also?”
was the pious exclamation of the suffering and patient Job. But this topic of consolation, taken by itself, is defective, inasmuch as it is drawn from the power only of God, without applying to his other attributes of wisdom and goodness, which are equally essential to his nature, and equally if not more interesting to our comforts. Knowing as we do the immense distance at which we are placed from our Almighty Creator, and
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our nothingness in his eyesight, we are constrained to acquiesce in any exercise of that unlimited power which he possesses over his creatures. “Shall a man contend with God, “ or the son of man, which is but dust and “ ashes, stand before him?” By such reasoning, founded only upon one attribute of the divine Being, his power, and their utter inability to withstand it, men may learn to practise resignation, a fullen and Stoical resignation to those operations of the Divine will which interrupt or interfere with their own earthly gratifications. But how different from such a disposition is the pious and grateful resignation of the Christian under afflictions. Living at a more mature period of the human intellect, and having his mind enlightened by the cheering splendor of a more excellent system of religious knowledge, he can discern the wisdom and the goodness of God, constantly and invariably attending the works of his power. Being given to know thoroughly the nature and intention of his present state of existence, he readily submits himself to every trial with which his Almighty Father shall see fit to visit

visit him. He endures afflictions with firmness, yea even with cheerfulness, as well knowing the wise and gracious purposes for which these afflictions are sent unto him ; to wean him from a world which is not to be his rest, but to which he is by nature and habit too much attached ; to purify his mind from all gross and sensual affections ; to quicken in him those graces which are the peculiar ornaments of the Christian character, and to call into vigorous action the many excellent virtues which alone can render him a worthy inhabitant of those blessed regions, where pain and sorrow shall be remembered no more, and where “ this his
“ light affliction, which is but for a moment,
“ shall work out for him a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.”

The disorders and irregularities apparent in the moral government of the world, whether affecting the fortunes of states or the condition of individuals, were observed before they could be clearly explained or satisfactorily accounted for. The unassisted reason of men could not account for them consistently with the idea of one supremely
power-

powerful, wise, and good Being. They observed in their own minds a continued struggle and contest between good and evil principles, and transferred that idea to the universe. And hence arose the strange and degrading doctrine of two powerful and independent Beings, who separately exercised their contradictory influence over the natural and moral world ; the one the author of order and happiness to the human race, the other delighting to promote confusion and unhappiness. In the earlier ages of the world, and during the infantine imbecility of the powers of the human mind, we are not surprised that such an expedient should be resorted to. The idea was the most obvious, perhaps, of any which could then present itself to them upon the subject ; and it seemed, according to the narrow views they had as yet been able to take of the divine operations, to offer the readiest solution of a difficulty with which they had begun to be embarrassed. That it should have been adopted by men in after ages, whom experience had supplied with a larger stock of materials to work upon, who had such infi-

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nately

nately greater advantages from the more expanded state of the mental faculties, and who had been admitted to behold the manifold wisdom of God in the Gospel of his Son, is a circumstance much more extraordinary, and much less excusable.

But this scheme, like all other attempts to explain, on human principles, the nature, attributes, and government of God, introduces greater difficulties than those which it pretends to solve. This is no place to combat at large a doctrine so often and so ably refuted. Suffice it to observe, 1. that it was derogating from the perfections of the Divine Being, to suppose that there was any power independent of his dominion, capable of disturbing his counsels and impeding his operations. Such a doctrine must necessarily tend to weaken the reverence of the pious believer, and to destroy the confidence which he reposes in the powerful protection of his heavenly Creator: it must therefore, if adopted, have an unfavourable effect upon his moral character, and consequently it cannot be true. Again, it bears a contradiction upon the face of it; and, 3. it is confuted

futed by the order of the natural world. We see there an apparent contest between good and evil : but the evil never predominates ; it is only an instrument in the hand of God for the promotion of the general good ; and by its agency thus directed is the usual course of the world maintained. The desolating storms of winter prepare the way for the more fruitful seasons of the year : in short, every natural evil is more than counterbalanced by its consequent production of good ; like the discords in a musical composition, which are only so far distinguishable, as they heighten the general effect, and render it more gratifying and complete. The inference then is obvious : if God so direct the vicissitudes of the natural world, as that they shall serve to the continual advantage of his creatures, how much more must his power be thus beneficially exercised in directing the revolutions of the moral and political world ! This is a point indeed, as we have seen already, not so easily ascertained as the other ; but whenever it can be ascertained, in ever so few instances, and even with an inferior degree of

certainly, we cannot but feel an increase of reverence and gratitude towards the Almighty Governor of all things. For though every act of Omnipotence is performed with equal facility, and the Almighty can call an universe into existence, as easily as he can assign its proper place and office to the smallest particle of matter, yet to human apprehension the power and the wisdom of God will appear to be much more wonderfully displayed in causing the different views, the jarring interests, and the discordant passions of men to work together to effect his eternal purposes, than in governing the inanimate or the brute creation.

That the wisdom and the goodness of God have been thus continually employed since the creation of the world, that they will be thus employed as long as the world endureth, is an awful and important truth, which Revelation, and Revelation alone, could have unfolded to us. This is the only key which opens to us the internal springs that govern the great machine of the universe; and this to the candid and impartial reasoner furnishes no mean argument of its authority

authority and divine origin. When we examine the history of the world without a reference to the purposes of God, as they are to be collected from Revelation, we perceive nothing but a confused heap of events, interesting perhaps to the speculative politician, who loves to investigate the immediate causes of the rise and fall of empires, but which present not the progress of any regular and uniform plan for the amelioration of mankind, nor any well-connected view of the purposes of that Being who created the world, and whose power is therefore conceived to be continually employed in promoting its welfare and improvement.

The heathen historians, whom we admire so much and so justly for the beauty and brilliancy of their language, the acuteness of their remarks, the profundity of their reflections, and the accurate minuteness with which they have investigated the sources of national prosperity and greatness, or the causes which more or less directly contributed to the downfall of states and kingdoms, yet present us with no views of this sort. It is the work of man which they de-
c 3 scribe,

scribe, and not the work of God ; the operation of human causes and for human purposes, and not the agency of divine wisdom and power for the general benefit of mankind. Their details may be useful in a human point of view, as we may learn from them what mode of human conduct has most frequently contributed to the advancement of nations, and what have been the usual immediate occasions of their downfall; and as long as human nature continues in its present state, the instrumentality of these will ever be the same. But we must search farther, we must ascend up higher to a much purer source of instruction, to learn that all these things are under the superintendence, and in the appointment of God, the all-wise Governor of the universe; that the changes and accidents of the world are in his hands; and that “ he doth dispose
“ and turn them as it seemeth best to his
“ godly wisdom,” for the furtherance of his original purposes of mercy towards mankind. In the Scriptures of revealed wisdom alone is the Almighty displayed in this most amiable and interesting relation to his creatures :

tures : we can hardly open a page without feeling our reverence, our gratitude, and our hope, awakened by the important declaration, that “ He is the Governor among nations, He ruleth in the kingdoms of men, “ He maketh poor and maketh rich, He removeth kings and setteth up kings, He putteth up and plucketh down : of Him, “ and to Him, and through Him, are all “ things.”

Every portion of the history of mankind, and more especially the important changes with which states and kingdoms have from time to time been affected, are therefore to be reckoned amongst the operations of divine government, and subservient to the eternal purposes of divine wisdom and goodness. The histories of particular ages or of particular nations, like the separate parts of some complex design, if surveyed singly, and not as relative and constituent parts of a whole, will appear to us inelegant in their construction, because we shall be ignorant of their just application and use. Perhaps there is nothing which has been so injurious to the cause of Revelation as these imperfect

and unconnected surveys of the history of the world: nothing which has afforded a more plausible triumph to the infidel, or been a more heavy stumblingblock in the way of the unlearned believer. But when we consider them in their just light, and apply them as Revelation teaches us, we shall discover the outlines of a great and benevolent plan, for the improvement of mankind, which has been carrying on from the creation to the present time. Such a survey would furnish us with the best and most powerful arguments to repel the objections of the unbeliever, founded upon the apparent disorders of the moral world, the different manner of God's dealings with mankind, and the seemingly fortuitous distribution of the blessings and miseries of life. Such a survey, necessary at all times to enable us to make a right judgment of the Divine operations, would be more particularly expedient at the present period, when the moral and the political world seem to be in as great a state of confusion as in any of the ages past, and when, to use the Psalmist's expression, " All the foundations of the earth
" are

“are out of course.” A review of the past dispensations of Providence will serve to convince us that the present are also conducted by him, and directed in conformity to his original design in calling man into existence: that as in the natural world the storms and tempests fulfil his word and execute his commandments, so in the moral world the angry passions of men and the madness of the people, more insensate than “the raging of the sea,” are yet in his rule and governance, and serve to the accomplishment of his all-merciful purposes. We read, that when the barbarous nations desolated the Roman empire, the Christians imagined, from the dreadful calamities of the times, that the end of the world was at hand: they could not foresee that these convulsions would ultimately tend to the more general diffusion and establishment of Christianity: and we know not what a glorious and happy state of things may result from the present disorders, nor how closely they may be found connected with the greatest and most incalculable blessings to our descendants.

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To justify the ways of God, and to vindicate them from the wicked aspersions which the folly and presumption of man have at times cast upon them, is to the Christian a most engaging and profitable task ; it is the most honourable employment of those faculties, which were given him to set forth the glory and to advance the welfare of man. These two ends have a strong affinity to one another; and we best answer the latter of them, by endeavouring to promote the former. It is an employment peculiarly adapted to us on whom the ends of the world are come, who can look back through so long a succession of ages upon the diversified operation of the divine perfections, and, guided by the light of Revelation, are enabled to discern, in all their diversities of form and manner, a constant and uniform reference to one great end, worthy of the wisdom and benevolence of the Most High. Indeed it will not be surprising if, after all our researches, there should be some difficulties which we are not yet enabled to solve, and some links of the golden chain suspended from his footstool, which are still invisible to

us,

us, and will continue to be so till we shall be admitted into his presence, and shall see and know him even as we are known. But we shall be able to discover enough to know that his operations are always in harmony with his perfections, and to learn a cheerful and pious submission to every dispensation of his providence.

In the vast field of the history of God's dealings with his creatures, amid the countless variety of objects which are there presented to our view, there are some which claim a more particular attention on account of their more immediate connection with the preservation and establishment of true religion: and to exhibit these in their connection with, and their subserviency to, such an exalted and benevolent purpose, will be the business of the following Lectures.

The Almighty has made use of a variety of means for the effecting of this purpose: but that variety is the variety of wisdom, and strictly reconcileable with the uniformity of his design; which was by no
hasty

hasty and extraordinary methods, by no violations of the order of things which he had previously established, but by continued discipline, and through progressive stages of improvement, to lead the human race gradually forward to the great end of their creation: and the spiritual nutriment with which he supplied them was varied, according as they advanced from the weakness of childhood to the strength and stature of the full-grown man. Accordingly as he addressed his people at sundry times, so we read that it was also in divers manners, suitable to the progressive state of their moral and intellectual faculties at each particular period. And hence we observe a very great and striking difference in the doctrines which he revealed to his people in different ages, in the moral duties which he prescribed to them, in the mode of worship which he exacted of them, and in the evidences on which their belief in him was to be founded: and it would be no very difficult task to prove, that in every instance the means which he made use of were in their kind
and

and in their degree most fitted to produce the effect intended, agreeably to the original plan by which all his dealings with his creatures appear to have been governed.

It is evidently requisite that speculative truths should be proportioned to the faculties of those by whom they are enjoined ; and that modes of conduct should have a similar adaptation to the moral powers of those to whom they are enjoined. This is a rule which is never violated in any part of the divine dispensations. Christians under the Gospel have more sublime doctrines revealed to them than any that are to be found in the Patriarchal or Mosaic systems ; they are farther advanced in the scale of intellectual improvement : and if we are required to make greater sacrifices of worldly inclination than were exacted of the ancient people of God, let it be remembered, that the Gospel holds out more animating motives to our obedience, and promises us much higher and nobler rewards, than they either knew or could duly estimate.

The frequent and familiar intercourse which the Patriarchs appear to have had
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with their Maker, and the copious detail and minute specification of duties enjoined to the Israelites, have been the occasion of much sarcastic remark and profane derision to the unbeliever, who has neglected to consider the many exigences of human nature at that early period, the peculiar character of the people to whom these revelations were made, and the extensive purposes of benevolence to be answered by them.

Infidel writers seem in general to have fallen into the mistake, that mankind in the earlier ages of the world were upon the same level, in point of intellectual strength, with their descendants in these latter times, without considering the advantages which these must have over the former, in consequence of long experience, and a variety of other causes. Were they justified in such a supposition, their objections to many parts of the Bible history would have a degree of force not easy to be withstood. But when we have learned that there has been an infancy of the species analogous to that of the individuals of whom it is composed, and that the infancy of human Nature required
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a different mode of treatment from that which was suitable to its advanced state, all cause of objection ceases, and we have only to admire the goodness and wisdom of God in thus graciously accommodating his government in all ages to the wants and capacities of his creatures.

I pretend not to much novelty of design, nor perhaps will the want of it appear to be compensated by a more judicious selection, or a more striking display of the materials which the subject shall be found to supply. My choice has been determined by a wish to contribute to the improvement of the younger part of my hearers, to whom alone any thing of mine can be supposed to be addressed; following in this respect, but at a humble distance, the steps of one of the most learned of my predecessors, who, with abilities equal to the discussion of almost any subject, chose on this occasion to accommodate himself to the character and the wants of those whose improvement is the principal object of this institution. But what in him resulted from the benevolent condescension of superior talents, must in me be imputed
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to a conscious inability of treating, as they deserve, subjects of a more remote and difficult nature. The subject however before us can never be unimportant as long as Christianity shall last: it will admit of many interesting details: not much of new, perhaps, remains to be said upon this, any more than upon most other subjects of theological discussion. But considering to whom I address myself, it may be sufficient if the information upon this point, which is scattered through the works of other writers, should be exhibited in a new and more connected form: and great indeed will the reward be, if, in addition to the other means of religious improvement which the institutions of this place so liberally supply, these Lectures shall in any degree contribute to their becoming wise unto salvation—a part of wisdom which shall be their comfort and their glory when human wisdom shall no longer profit any thing.

S E R M O N II.

ISAIAH xli. 8.

But thou, Israel, art my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend.

IT is not given to man to know his end, nor the number of his days. On this obvious truth are founded the most animating and most effectual exhortations of our religion to daily circumspectness of conduct, and unwearied continuance in well-doing. And it is probable, that a greater quantity of virtue and moral obedience is thus produced, than would have been the consequence of man's being certified how long he has to live.

But this uncertainty, as it contributes to the growth of religion in individuals, serves also in its consequences to promote the purposes

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poses of God for the general improvement of mankind. It has a close and necessary connection with the love of life, which is one of the most active and most useful principles implanted in our nature. As we are enjoined, in regard to the things of eternity, to be ready to meet our Judge to-day, not knowing that we shall be alive on the morrow ; so in regard to the things of this life, hoping that we shall live on the morrow, we are impelled to exert ourselves to-day, that we might in some degree provide for the wants thereof. The day of our death being thus impenetrably concealed from our eyes, we apply ourselves to our temporal concerns as though it were never to arrive. And thus the business of the world continually goes on, and the eternal purposes of God are advancing by the instrumentality of his creatures. The time allotted for the operation of each in his separate capacity is short indeed, compared with the whole time which the Almighty has made requisite for the perfecting of his designs : nay, the contributions of an age to this effect are sometimes too minute to be readily distinguished.

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And yet insignificant as such instruments seem, however inadequate their operations, yet it is by their immediate means that the everlasting counsels of Almighty wisdom, and power, and goodness, are carried into effect. And whilst men have thought themselves entirely occupied in the narrow sphere of their own concerns, they have been in reality contributing, in a greater or less degree, to the furtherance of those designs, in the accomplishment of which all the nations of the earth were ultimately to be blessed.

Such reflections will naturally occur to us when we direct our attention backwards, through a space of nearly six thousand years, upon the wide scene of God's dealings with man from the creation of the world to the present time, and observe by what slow and gradual steps, by what agency of causes apparently weak and insufficient, his great purposes have been carried on.

It has been frequently asked by those who surveyed Christianity with no very favourable aspect, why it should please the Almighty, that, in a case which concerned so nearly the best interests and truest happiness

of his créatures, his proceedings should be thus characterized ; and why, as he certainly had the power, he had not the will also to adopt other methods less slow and circuitous, which might have saved them from much painful discipline, and a long preparatory institution. But we contend that the method which he has adopted is the one most exactly suited to man's earthly condition, and most agreeable to the functions which are here given him to exercise. No other method more expeditious could have been used by the Almighty, without requiring him to mould afresh the constitution of man, and to give him a new nature and new faculties : and why he has not done this is a question which the infidel has no right to ask, and which we are no wise concerned to answer. It might as well be asked, why it has pleased the Almighty to create a material world or material beings at all. Questions of this sort are arguments only of the folly and presumption of him by whom they are proposed. The pious Christian, in determining the propriety and wisdom of the divine operations, is cautious of ascending too

too high : he asks not of his Creator, why hast thou made me thus ? but is rather thankful that he has been called into any form of existence : and when he considers the means which his heavenly Father has appointed, subsequent to the first creation of man, for advancing him to everlasting life and glory, all other feelings are absorbed in reverence and gratitude.

Before we come to take a particular and specific survey of the dealings of God with mankind, in regard to the several articles mentioned in the preceding Discourse, viz. the doctrines imparted to them at different periods, the mode of worship prescribed to them, the moral duties enjoined to them, and the evidences on which their faith in him was founded, and shew that these were duly proportioned to their condition at those periods ; it will be proper to take a general sketch of the history of man from the earliest ages to the coming of Christ, according to the information which is to be gathered from Holy Scripture. We shall thus be better prepared to enter upon the details into which the consideration of those articles will

necessarily lead us, and better able to connect the condition of man at different periods, with the measure of divine Revelation then vouchsafed to him. Agreeably to the leading idea of the preceding Lecture, we shall discover the outlines at least of a regular and progressive plan for the improvement of man; and would our limits admit such an extension of the enquiry, we might, by turning the lustre of Revelation upon the dark and intricate picture of human affairs, make out satisfactorily, that the many apparent irregularities and disorders in God's moral government of the world not only were no impediments to such a plan, but were more or less directly real and effective instruments of its advancement.

At the creation of man the Almighty graciously condescended to become his instructor; and what our reason concludes to have been necessary, Revelation assures us was true. The condition of the Father of mankind was in a most eminent degree distinguished from that of all his descendants. They are born to advantages in the presence and attentions of parents which he must
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have been destitute of; nor could he have learned sufficiently early the means of immediate subsistence, but from the instruction of his Creator. How that knowledge was conveyed to him, as it is not easy for us to imagine, so it is hardly necessary to enquire. It is sufficient for our present purpose that the fact was so, and could not have been otherwise. Without referring to the divine influence, it is impossible to conceive how man should have acquired the faculty of speech, or the power of reason. The Almighty therefore must have both fitted him for the reception of knowledge, and communicated to him such a measure of it as was necessary to the state of trial in which he was placed.

Rabbinical writers have given us some very extraordinary accounts of the great perfections enjoyed by the Father of the human race whilst he remained in Paradise; but they are such as the Scriptures will hardly be found to warrant, and Christians are now in general inclined to look upon them as visionary and unfounded. We shall give a more probable account, and one much

more consistent with Scriptural declarations, if we place him at a great distance both in a moral and intellectual point of view below many of his remote descendants. Beside the information which we have just supposed to have been conveyed to him, as being necessary towards the means of his immediate subsistence, the quantity of knowledge which his condition could then require or be able to receive must appear to be very small. As a first and necessarily preparatory step, he is made acquainted with the nature of his own dependant and relative situation: that he was not the author of his own being, but received it from one much more mighty and powerful than himself; to whom also the existence of every thing about him was to be ascribed; and consequently that it was in the power of him who created him to increase or diminish the number of things within his reach, and which he had already found were directly subservient to the pleasures, the comforts, and even the continuance of his life. And this is supposing as much as the conciseness of the Mosaic records, in this most early and
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most interesting period of the history of our species, and the nature of the case itself, particularly when taken in reference to the subsequent conduct of Adam, will in any wise be found to justify. With regard to the moral instruction conveyed to him, this seems to be equally scanty, and consequently argues the narrow capacity of him who was to be the subject of it. The Almighty in this respect evidently treats Adam as what he really was in understanding—a child : one only duty of obedience seems to have been exacted of him, contained in that prohibitory precept, “ The tree of knowledge of good and evil, which is in the midst of the garden, thou shalt not eat thereof.” And Adam, like a mere child, to gratify a present and improper inclination, too readily seduced to listen to pernicious counsels, and regardless of future consequences, disobeys the commandment, and subjects himself and his descendants to the penalty of his disobedience.

Thus was broken the first covenant into which the Almighty entered with man at his creation : but as his wisdom foresaw the frailty

frailty of Adam, so had his mercy provided a second covenant, that of grace, which was calculated to restore mankind to that immortality, which through the transgression of their first parent they had forfeited. This covenant was obscurely hinted to Adam immediately after his fall, and might have contributed in some measure to comfort him under the affliction which the consequence of his disobedience had occasioned: though he was unable, nor did the divine purpose allow him at the time to understand clearly the nature of its beneficial operation. To prepare mankind for its more full and explicit promulgation, by such means and by such degrees as their faculties at different periods would admit of, was the object of all the subsequent revelations which God made of himself, till the time came that he saw fit to make a bright and perfect display of his gracious purposes by the ministry of his Son Jesus Christ: and his moral government of the world both has been, and continually will be, directed to this one great end, to establish more firmly the knowledge and to diffuse more generally the

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the blessings of this second covenant, whose operation shall extend backward to the creation of the world, and forward far beyond the reach of time.

Though the crime of Adam had justly subjected him to the sentence pronounced against transgression, and though one part of that sentence, viz. his dismissal from Paradise, was immediately executed, yet it appears that he was not deprived of that communication with the Almighty, which he had enjoyed during the state of his innocence. And indeed, as such a communication was then necessary to direct him to his subsistence, amid the various fruits which the earth poured forth spontaneously, it was become much more so now, when the ground was cursed for his sake, and refused to yield the necessities of human life, except in return for human labour. A new scene was now opened to Adam, and new ideas added to his stock of religious knowledge: whatever he had known before of the power of his heavenly Father, he was now experimentally convinced of the certain exercise of it in the punishment of disobedience.

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Previous to the fall of Adam, the whole of his devotion, it is probable, consisted of simple expressions of praise and gratitude towards his Creator: but afterwards a new and most important addition was made to his code of religious observance; the institution of animal sacrifice, which evidently began at this time, and cannot well be considered as being of human device. It must have been the appointment of God, and designed, among other purposes, for keeping continually alive in him the remembrance of his transgression, and of the dreadful nature of that penalty to which he had become subject; and at the same time to prefigure that great and ultimate sacrifice which should one day be offered up as a sufficient atonement for the sins of Adam and of all his descendants.

The days of Adam, says the sacred Historian, were nine hundred and twenty years: so long a time was he exhibited to the world as an awful example of the power and the justice as well as of the mercies of God. The most remarkable circumstances in the life of Adam were those which took
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place in the earlier part of it ; and these were too important to him in their consequences to be forgotten ; they must have continually employed his reflections, and been the frequent subject of his conversation with his numerous descendants : and thus would some ideas of the existence of God, as well as of his principal attributes, forming the first outline of religious knowledge, be diffused and continued among them. But beside the knowledge which would thus be traditionally conveyed to mankind, it pleased the Almighty, who is not more ready to supply the animal than the spiritual wants of his creatures, to impart to them immediately from himself such instruction, at various times and in a variety of ways, as they appeared to stand in need of. Thus we find him at a very early period in the history of the world interfering in a manner sufficiently intelligible to testify his approbation of the piety of Abel, and to punish the wickedness of his murderer.

It will not, I trust, be considered as refining too much, if we endeavour to shew from the different manner in which the Almighty received

received the offerings of Cain and Abel, and the greater respect which he had to those of the latter, which was the occasion of the crime of Cain, that from this circumstance a new and important piece of instruction was intended to be impressed upon mankind. It does not appear that there was any essential difference in the value of their respective offerings, simply considered, which occasioned this difference in the manner of their reception ; each brought according to his ability of the fruits of his several occupation. But a very different disposition of mind in each accompanied the presentation of their offerings : what the one performed unwillingly as a painful task, was to the other a delightful service ; and hence, say many writers, the Lord respected the offering of Abel, but unto Cain and his offering he had not respect. Might not then this difference of procedure to each have been intended to teach man a lesson, which is not to be collected from any previous account of his dealings with him ; not only that the inward feelings of the heart must accompany the outward works of men's hands in the service

service of their Maker, but that he seeth and knoweth what man cannot do, whether such feelings accompany his services or no. Man had been made to know before that the eye of his Creator surveyed all his outward actions ; and this was perhaps the first time that he was given to understand that all his inward thoughts and intentions were alike open to his inspection. And the expedience of teaching him such a lesson as early as his faculties could be made to comprehend it, will readily be allowed by every one who considers how nearly it is connected with men's moral improvement, and how much of the wickedness of mankind at this day is ascribable to their habitual forgetfulness of this omniscience of God, unto whom, in the sublime language of our Liturgy, " all hearts " be open, all desires known, and from " whom no secrets are hid."

A very beautiful picture of the effect of religious knowledge thus diffused amongst men in the first ages of the world is given in the short accounts preserved of one of the most illustrious of the descendants of Adam. Enoch, we are told, after having walked before

fore God upwards of three hundred years, was translated that he should not see death. This event must have produced a very striking effect upon the minds of men at the time, who, having already learned that God is, and that he is a punisher of disobedience, had now the additional and much nobler motive to their obedience, the conviction that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

But such was still the weakness of men's moral and intellectual faculties, that the case of Enoch must be considered as a most rare and brilliant example of uniform obedience to the laws of God; and it shines with a brighter lustre in proportion to the gloom with which it is surrounded.

As mankind became more numerous, the evil propensities of their corrupt nature displayed themselves with increased activity in a greater variety of forms, and seemed to disdain the control which Religion had hitherto been able to lay upon them. Of the nature of their offences against the Divine laws the Scripture has not minutely informed us; but how far and how generally they

they were fallen from that state of innocence and obedience, which could alone ensure the favour of their Creator, is evident from the tremendous judgments with which he now visited them. It was found expedient that the whole race of mankind should be cut off, with the exception of one family alone, which might serve to re-people the earth, to become the depositaries of divine knowledge, and to perpetuate to future ages the remembrance of an event so strongly declaratory of the infinite power of God, and the certain exercise of it in the punishment of disobedience.

Under the Patriarchal, and more especially under the Jewish dispensation, temporal inflictions of God's wrath were the usual and oftentimes the immediate consequences of any general deviation from his laws. And some are unable to reconcile with this circumstance the repeated transgressions recorded of mankind at these periods. When the judgments of God were so frequent and so visible in the earth, they are surprised that men were so slow in learning from them to practise righteousness; and hence they would

insinuate an objection, which, according to them, admits of no easy solution, against the credibility of the Mosaic records.

But let us recur to our first principle, and the proposed objection will no longer seem formidable. Is a froward child easily and at once reclaimed from the error of his ways? does the recollection of punishment long outlive the smart of it? or is it in general sufficiently powerful to keep him from yielding to the very next temptation by which he may be assailed? Nay more, in regarding the conduct of a great many men, convinced as they are by repeated experience, that vicious indulgences are closely and necessarily connected with temporal sufferings, how seldom do we find them use that conviction to the adoption of settled habits of temperance and self-denial!

From Adam to Noah were but two generations: the knowledge of God therefore, and the best means of rendering him service, cannot well be supposed to have been lost during that time amongst any description of mankind. The world was still but in a state of infancy, and the Almighty seems to have
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watched over the gradual improvement of his creatures even as a father watcheth over his children ; to have given them from time to time such instructions, and to have supplied such chastisements and such encouragements, as were suitable to the exigencies of their situation, and adapted to the level of their understandings.

Another covenant, more distinct in its import and more extensive in its conditions, is again proposed by the Almighty to Noah and his family, after the rest of the world had been swept away. A most awful and affecting lesson had been given them of the danger of awakening his anger by their own disobedience ; and, notwithstanding the yet infantile state of the human character, we may reasonably suppose, that the impressions which the scene they had so lately witnessed had made upon their minds would not soon be obliterated ; that they would continue, for a considerable time at least, steadfast in executing their part of the conditions of that covenant which God had vouchsafed to them : and therefore, according to our leading principle, the knowledge of God, and the practice

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tice of man's duty towards him, would still continue in a state of progressive advancement.

It is the remark of an intelligent writer, speaking of the usual progress of any true doctrine, that it has three remarkable periods; 1. its promulgation, 2. its corruption, and, 3. its restoration, when it is more firmly established, and shines more brightly than at its first promulgation. In surveying the whole scheme of divine wisdom delivered to mankind at different periods, we should have frequent opportunities of applying and illustrating this remark.

The first religious truth conveyed to mankind, and which forms the very foundation of all the rest, is the existence of God, the supreme and only Governor of the universe; whose power is through all and above all, and who shares not with another in the possession of this supreme jurisdiction. In the earlier ages of the world, though mankind might not have understood this important truth in its full extent, and though the knowledge of it by no means served to secure their uniform obedience to the laws of
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God, yet they did not corrupt its simplicity. It was reserved for the depravity of their remoter descendants to introduce new objects of religious adoration, and even to pay to them exclusively those honours which were due to the Almighty Creator alone. In what strange perversion of human sentiment these corruptions originated, and by what means they were introduced into general practice, the Scripture has not informed us, and it is not our business at this time to enquire. It is sufficient to observe, that in the days of Peleg, the fifth in descent from Noah, idolatry had in a great measure overspread the earth; and that, in the opinion of some, it was to stay its alarming progress that the Divine interposition took place at the tower of Babel, of which the name of Peleg is sufficiently descriptive.

The Scriptures do not give us any direct information of the religious state of mankind during the long period of years which elapsed from the dispersion to the call of Abraham. We are enabled however to col-

lect, that none of the usual means for the improvement of the world in knowledge and virtue were discontinued: amongst others, the great longevity of the Patriarchs, which connected them together as contemporaries with their descendants of several generations, was admirably well calculated to continue among them the knowledge of the only true God, and the essential principles of religious morality.

And here we cannot but observe, that in the different periods which the Almighty has at different times allotted to human existence, the uniformity of his wisdom in a diversity of operation is obvious and striking. A considerable length of days seems necessary to the forefathers of the human race, both for the purpose just mentioned, and for the more speedy peopling of the earth. But when this necessity no longer pressed, when the evils arising from the extended age of mankind began to preponderate, and corruptions of every kind appeared to be more firmly rooted in consequence of it, the Creator adopts a very different plan: the lives
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of mankind are successively shortened, till, at no great distance of time, they were reduced within their present limits.

But still mankind at large, like wayward children, were with difficulty, and, for the most part, not at all, to be kept in the faith and fear of God ; a great portion of the world continued sunk in idolatry, and devoted to those corrupt practices, which are its invariable attendants ; and at length the Almighty, in his wisdom, found it expedient to discontinue any direct and immediate interference in the concerns of the generality of mankind, and to select a chosen generation, who should be his peculiar people, to whom his oracles should for a time be exclusively entrusted, amidst the approaching corruptions of the world, and who should in after ages become the means of the more general diffusion of true Religion.

Nothing seems to have more offended the pious scruples of those who, in their superior jealousy for the honour of God, affect to consider the Mosaic records as derogating from his perfections, than this part of the Divine economy. They are extremely

shocked, forsooth, at such an instance of arbitrary partiality, ascribed to a Being of infinite wisdom and goodness; whose revealed mercies, they contend, had the Almighty ever vouchsafed any, would have been at once communicated to the whole race of mankind, and not been kept shut up for so considerable a period in the possession of so small a portion of them. Nor can they reconcile with their notions of God, his bearing with them so long, and continuing to them his favours, even after they had justly offended him by their disobedience and apostasy: “But who hath known the mind of the Lord, or who hath been his counsellor?” How often must men be told of the unfairness of reasoning upon single and separate parts of the Divine operations, without recurring to his general purpose, and observing the connection of these with the advancement of that purpose, in that manner and by such degrees as is most consistent with his usual form of proceeding? And such a connection, as often as it can be traced, (whether immediate or remote, is nothing to the purpose,) is a satisfactory justification

tification of those dealings of the Almighty which, to fleshly eyes, seem less consistent with his wisdom and goodness. As to the purpose itself, that was never meant to be the subject of our animadversion: it is sufficient that we know what it is, and that all things are made to work together in its advancement.

Against the charge of partiality, in God's selecting the descendants of Abraham as depositaries of the true religion, it may be fairly urged, that the experiment had already been tried, in two instances, how far mankind could continue in the knowledge and worship of the only true God, without an especial and limited revelation. Adam, as we have seen, left this knowledge to his descendants; and the Almighty revealed himself also to particular persons, such as Enoch, Lamech, and others, and by them to mankind in general. Yet in the course of 1600 years from the creation of the world, we find all correct notions of religion and morality confined to Noah and his family, the rest of the world being sunk into idolatry and wickedness. Noah preserved the know-
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ledge of God, and left it to his descendants, and by their means was it diffused throughout the world : in a little more than 400 years every vestige of it had again almost entirely disappeared. Thus the selection of some particular family for this important purpose was not an instance of arbitrary partiality ; the measure was, humanly speaking, necessary ; and no just reason can be given why Abraham and his descendants should not have been selected, as well as any other people, from the great mass of mankind. Nay, if any credit be due to the Jewish traditions, Abraham seems in some measure to have entitled himself to some particular marks of the Divine notice. He had resisted the reigning corruptions : in the struggle between the dictates of conscience and paternal authority, he had nobly obeyed the former, and forsook his own nation and his father's house, rather than join in their idolatrous ceremonies. And further, after the Almighty had promised to Abraham, that in his seed should all the nations of the earth be blessed ; as it was his primary and unalterable purpose, that of his lineage, as concerning

cerning the flesh, should spring the future Redeemer of mankind; it was to be expected that his descendants should have a remarkable portion of divine favour shewn to them; that to them should all farther communications be made relative to this great event; that they should be, for the most part, a mighty and powerful nation, and advanced before the rest in the arts of civilized life; circumstances which, in a great degree, seem necessary to promote the ends for which they were designed.

As to the many instances of the Israelites rebelling against God, their almighty Sovereign, and their frequent apostasies from the pure doctrines which he taught them, before we can argue from these against the propriety of the selection, it must be demonstrated, that any other portion of mankind, enjoying the same advantages, would have walked more uniformly and unerringly, according to the measure of the light imparted to them.

Nor was it a blind, a weak, and human partiality which the Almighty shewed to the Israelites. He treated them as his children,

dren, who continually stood in need of the chastening hand of their father : he punished them for their offences with a severity proportioned to their means and opportunities of acting in a way more pleasing to him : so that, as a good writer has observed, it has been a matter of wonder to some, that the Almighty should suffer his people to be so often afflicted by temporal evils : but objectors of either kind do not seem to consider, that he had higher and nobler objects in view than the prosperity and adversity of the Israelites, who were merely the instruments in his hands for the production of events, infinitely more important to the universal interests of mankind, than the happiness of that particular people.

But even after the selection of this remarkable family, we do not find, from the accounts which are preserved of the characters and history of its successive heads, that any alteration was made in the human composition, that any new and more forcing methods were adopted by the Almighty for accelerating the growth of pure religion
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among them. Abraham himself and his two immediate descendants, in their several compacts with their heavenly Leader, seem to stipulate, as it were, for a greater portion of temporal blessings, as the reward of their adhering faithfully to their part of the conditions ; and are apparently ignorant of, or not concerned about, those more distant, but more excellent rewards, which were to be the consequences of obedience to them and to all the generations after them.

And even after the descendants of Abraham had become a separate and established people, and had a place given to them among the nations of the earth ; yet after the variety of moral and religious instruction imparted to them, the Almighty thought proper to appoint earthly and temporal sanctions to the laws which he enjoined them, as being most suitable to their narrow capacities and sensual habits, and most likely to influence their moral and religious conduct. So that the character of the whole Jewish people appears to be much similar to that of the dregs of mankind at present, on whom spiritual motives have no manner of effect,

effect, and whom the sword of the magistrate alone can keep in any tolerable subjection to the regulations of civil society.

It is a most strange and surprising circumstance, not to be otherwise accounted for but by considering the moral world as being yet in its infancy, the very strong hold which idolatry seems to have had upon the minds of the Jews in the earlier part of their history. It was their most darling sin, from which they were weaned with the utmost difficulty, and into which they most readily relapsed. This failing, common to all nations at the time, was less excusable in the Jews, as they had the true object of their devotion so expressly pointed out to them, and had been witnesses of the many great and wonderful things which he had done in their behalf. Nor was the certainty of the infliction of temporal evils sufficient to cure them of this favourite propensity. Their crime, indeed, in general was not so much an absolute rejection of the only true God, as their taking the gods of the heathen into community with him, and making them also the objects of their religious adoration.

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But this was a crime alike offensive to the purity of the Most High ; it was alike forbidden by the law of Moses, and repugnant to every notion which enlightened reason is competent to form of the Unity of the supreme Being. Throughout the far greater part of the Jewish history, we find them, by the adoption of the idolatrous practices and impure celebrations of the neighbouring nations, perpetually incurring the anger of their heavenly Sovereign, and undergoing the effects of his vengeance, oppression in their own, or servitude in their enemy's country ; and it was not till after the last great captivity in Babylon, after long and repeated experience of the certain consequences of their disobedience, that their moral constitution gathered strength enough to throw off those impurities which had so long been attached to it.

But still the purposes of God were advancing, and the improvement of mankind went on by sure, though oftentimes imperceptible degrees. Separated as the Jews were, as a peculiar people, from the rest of mankind, yet we observe that their fates
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and fortunes were never unimportant in their consequences to the instruction of other nations. In a very early part of their history, they were sent down into Egypt for this wise and benevolent purpose; and a very striking disposition was previously made, by establishing the dynasty of "shepherd kings," to ensure them a favourable reception; and when the time came for them to remove from thence to take possession of the land promised to their forefathers, the native princes are restored, who, from their hatred of shepherds, persecuted and oppressed the Israelites: and this made them willing to quit a land which abundantly supplied them with the means of sensual gratification, and to which therefore they were so much attached, that nothing short of the heaviest oppression could have inclined them to leave it. In the more advanced periods of their history, their frequent captivities were of undoubted service in diffusing more generally the seeds of true religion. It is true, they borrowed many of the corruptions of the people among whom they were; but at the same time they were of service in
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giving them some notions of a purer faith in return. The Greeks, when subdued by the Romans, imparted to their conquerors their literature and refinements; and when the Romans themselves became in their turn a prey to nations more hardy and uncivilized than themselves, their literary improvements were among the most precious spoils which their subduers received from them. But the Jews, whether conquered or conquering, amidst every variety of their political condition, contributed to the improvement of the people with whom they were most immediately concerned. The more acute and intelligent among them would be naturally inquisitive to know something of the religious creed of a nation so different from themselves, and subjected to such extraordinary dispensations: and thus would many of the Gentiles be admitted to the knowledge of the only true God, the God of Israel; they would be taught to reverence him in consequence of witnessing his power and justice in rewarding their allegiance, or in punishing their desertion. And it is well worthy of remark, that their Gentile neighbours were by no means ignorant of the nature

and conditions of that covenant, into which the Almighty had vouchsafed to enter with the Israelites: and they are introduced by the Prophets as justifying themselves in commencing hostilities against Israel, from the circumstance of their being instruments in his hands for the punishment of his rebellious people.

But the Jewish system was not intended to last for ever; it was temporary in its continuance, confined in its comprehension, and imperfect in its very constitution. It was, perhaps, the most effectual plan which the All-wise could adopt for the execution of his designs, consistently with the rules to which he had subjected the usual course of earthly circumstances. When it had effected the purposes for which it was instituted, it waxed old, and began to vanish away. When the fulness of time was come; when, by the efficacy of previous revelations, every thing was prepared for this sublime display of the mercy of God, which was promised from the beginning of time, and determined upon before the foundation of the world; when the improvement of the human faculties could bear such a measure

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ture of divine instruction ; and, in short, when every necessary disposition had been made ; God sent his only-begotten Son into the world to become the author of another and more excellent system, not temporary, but eternal ; not calculated for one particular portion of mankind, but of universal interest and importance ; not confined to the level of children in understanding, but suited to the faculties of the full-grown man, in the most expanded state of the human intellect, the admiration of glorified spirits, and the subject of the songs of angels.

SERMON III.

JOHN xvi. 12.

I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now.

IT has been frequently made a question, whether man, unenlightened by revealed wisdom, could ever have arrived at a knowledge of his Creator. They who have decided in the negative seem to have taken that part which is attended with the fewest difficulties. For there is nothing to be urged *à priori* against the probability that the Almighty should instruct the being whom he had created ; and a knowledge of his Creator would be among the first and most necessary parts of the instruction thus communicated to him. It were no easy task to prove, that man, in as early a period of his history as we find the notion of God existing,

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existing, possessed a sufficient share of intellectual strength to enable him to discover a truth which at this day he can readily demonstrate. The argument in favour of such a supposition is drawn from the powers of man's mind in an advanced state of civilization ; but it is not remembered how long a period of time must elapse before man, unassisted, (if ever,) would become civilized and enlightened, and that some knowledge of religion was more likely to precede such a state, than to have been a consequence of it. Proofs and illustrations of this universal tenet may readily be supposed to have sprung up out of civilization ; but the original idea itself, we contend, must be traced up to a higher source.

But facts are strongly against such a supposition, according to the earliest and most authentic history of mankind. Adam was not left for a day to collect, by reasoning upon the objects about him, the being of his Creator, but was convinced of this necessary truth by immediate and striking appeals to his senses. So important a lesson, once taught, could hardly ever be entirely lost, whatever corrupt additions might be made

made to it; however it might be distorted in passing through the depraved conceptions of men. The original idea was retained by the founders and legislators of nations ; and when men became advanced in intellectual exercise, they might then reason about what had certainly never been taught them by reason, and prove, by a reference to the magnificent structure and harmonious arrangement of the several parts of the universe, the truth of what had been handed down to them by tradition from the father of mankind. If language be the gift of God, and we cannot account for its origin otherwise, so did he supply also the noblest subject of language, the being and the perfections of him who created all things, and in whose good pleasure alone they still continue to exist.

“ The world,” saith the Apostle, “ by wisdom knew not God ;” which might mean either that men were not indebted to the highest exertion of their intellectual powers for the discovery of a Creator ; or that, having that information, they corrupted its purity and weakened its effects by incorporating with it the devices of human

and carnal wisdom. And the impurity which had mingled itself with their religion became alike attached to their moral practice. The errors and absurdities into which the heathen nations fell, even they who had been permitted to make the most astonishing advances in human arts and sciences, are a sufficient proof not only of the inability of human reason, when unassisted, to attain religious truth, but even of preserving it, for any considerable time, pure and undefiled, without frequent and continued communication of divine instruction. And this perhaps might be one amongst many other beneficial purposes of the Almighty, in withdrawing himself so long from so great a portion of mankind, and leaving them to their own inventions in religion, viz. to afford to us, on whom the ends of the world are come, a strong conviction of the necessity of that farther revelation of the divine nature and will which was made to mankind in the Gospel, and which the partial dispensation made to the Jews served to prepare and introduce.

The great orator and philosopher of Rome has left us a treatise, which contains a summary

mary of the various opinions of the ancient sages concerning the divine nature, and also of the arguments by which the principal sects, which then divided the philosophical world, endeavoured to establish their dogmas. It exhibits a comprehensive view of the progress which the wisest heathens had made towards the discovery of God, before “the Sun of righteousness arose,” “a light to lighten the Gentiles.” From it we learn that their reasonings produced only uncertainty, contradiction, and absurdity. Some denied the existence of an intelligent First Cause, the greater part doubted of it, and many of those who allowed it, yet excluded the Deity from any share in the formation and government of the world; and thus, whilst they pretended to believe in the being of a God, absurdly denied the necessity of it. Cicero himself, who has exposed and refuted the irrational notions of the more ancient philosophers, respecting the being and attributes of the Deity, could not establish more certain and just notions in their stead. He complains of the difficulty and obscurity of the subject, and challenges any person to prove that the truth
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had been discovered. He argues warmly in favour of the doctrine of a divine Providence in the character of the Stoic; but sinks at last into the gloomy and cheerless doubts of the Academic: and the discussion is closed with a vague and inconclusive opinion, which attributes a nearly equal degree of weight to the arguments for and against the existence and providence of God. How justly might the reasonings of the most illustrious heathens upon this interesting subject be characterized, in the language of the Apostle, as “vain babblings, and oppositions of science, falsely so called.”

One very remarkable difference between the religious books of the Jews and the philosophical works of the ancients, is, that whilst the latter were not able, by their metaphysical disquisitions, to acquire true and correct notions of God, we have the most just descriptions of the nature of the Supreme Being in the Hebrew Scriptures, without the smallest trace of any previous train of reasoning, by which such conclusions might have been gained. We do not find Moses, or any of the Prophets, endeavouring, like the heathen philosophers, to
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prove the being and attributes of God, from the order and harmony of the universe, or from the necessity of a first intelligent cause: but the representations which they give us of the Deity are founded upon certain knowledge of his existence, and a sensible experience of his providence.

Nor do we find those gradual advances in the discovery of God, or that variety of opinions concerning his nature, which would be observable, if their notions concerning this subject were merely the result of reason. But whilst the heathen philosophers endeavoured to improve upon or to refute the theological dogmas of those who went before them, the last writers in the Jewish Canon give us no other representations of the nature of God than are given by Moses: and we observe, from the beginning to the end of their sacred code, that uniformity of doctrine respecting the Supreme Being which is not to be found in the writings of the ancient heathens.

This remark, however, must be considered as strictly confined to that great fundamental truth of all religion, the existence of an Almighty Creator and Governor of the world,
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and his ability and will to punish the disobedience and to reward the obedience of his creatures; for on taking a more minute survey than we can do of the history of the Jews, from their establishment as a nation to the coming of Christ, we shall find, that as they advanced in intellectual strength, a proportionably greater degree of light was imparted, and a more full and explicit developement of the eternal purposes of God made to them by the ministry of the successors of Moses.

In the primeval and patriarchal ages of the world, as we have observed before, such a knowledge only of the divine Being seems to have been communicated to man, as his faculties were competent to receive, and as was necessary for his immediate direction. That he was capable of receiving no more may be urged *ex converso*, because no more appears to have been granted him: and the goodness of the Almighty was concerned in his revealing himself to his creatures as fully at least as their condition could bear. Their notions of God were therefore narrow and gross; and the services which they rendered him were dictated not so much by that love
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of God, which we are now given to understand can alone render them acceptable to him, as by an earthly attachment to their own immediate interest. We might be surpris'd at the faintness of their curiosity, and their appearing so little solicitous to know more of their heavenly Creator: but the time was not yet, when men could remove their attention from the cares of life, to the consideration of abstract questions. Their daily labours, which were necessary as the means of procuring their daily sustenance, would not allow them leisure, or inspire them with inclination or abilities, for the attainment of higher knowledge.

And when it pleas'd the Almighty to separate the descendants of Abraham as a chosen inheritance to himself, who should be the depositaries of his religion, and the future teachers of all mankind; yet they themselves are subjected to that progressive discipline which had been established from the beginning.

“The Law,” saith St. Paul, speaking of the Mosaic dispensation, “is our schoolmaster, to bring us to Christ.” This expression,

sion, agreeably to the idea upon which we have hitherto proceeded, teaches us to consider the religious state of the Jews as bearing the same analogy to Christianity, that the state of childhood does to that of the full-grown man. In conformity therefore with this circumstance, the knowledge communicated to them by Moses was far inferior to that which is revealed to us. They were taught, like children, only the first principles of religion; they were instructed in those doctrines only, without which religion could not possibly subsist. Their religious knowledge seems to have been confined to the existence and unity of God, a general idea of his attributes, and their dependence upon him as their national Lawgiver and Sovereign. These certainly were the only important doctrines explicitly taught in the Mosaic law; and though others might be inferred from it, yet they were concealed from general view by a veil of types and figures.

Proceeding from the writings of Moses to the prophecies, and from them to the Gospel revelation, we see the sacred roll of truth gradually

gradually unfolded, till HE at last appears, “ who has power fully to open the book, “ and to loosen the seals thereof.”

In these various degrees of religious knowledge, imparted from God to man, we perceive the same wisdom displayed in a diversity of operation.

We have before observed, that all the Creator's dealings with mankind are characterized by one general principle of proportion and order: that when he acts as a Teacher towards them, the knowledge which he imparts is always adapted to their progress in intellectual improvement; as a Law-giver, he regards in the same manner their moral powers; when in any other character, his dispensations are constantly proportioned to their faculties as well as their wants at the time, and are thus rendered subservient to the eternal purposes of his mercy.

Had he therefore at any time communicated to them truths which, in their nature, were unsuitable to the condition of their intellectual faculties, and which, from a misconception of them, might have become the means of their plunging into dangerous er-

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rors and delusions, it is evident that the principle of order would have been violated, and the progressive improvement of mankind would not have been consulted.

The religious truths conveyed by Moses to the Jews were, as we have just remarked, of the most simple and elementary kind, and are little more than a republication of the knowledge which had been delivered to their fathers in times past, and preserved in the world by tradition. That knowledge, however, continued not long in its original purity ; it was gradually deformed and corrupted by the admixture of human fancies. More especially, the doctrine of the divine Unity seems at the time of Moses to have been almost entirely lost ; and mankind had long been in the habit of paying divine honours to a multitude of fictitious deities.

The Jewish lawgiver, in the doctrinal part of his religious code, reestablishes, in their pristine simplicity, the ideas which had before been given to man of the nature and perfections of his Creator. The unity of God is more distinctly stated, and a heavy penalty is denounced against the people of Israel, should they either forsake the worship

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ship of the only true God, or (what they were the rather inclined to do) should they associate with him in equal honour the objects of idolatrous veneration. And this denunciation seems the more peculiarly necessary, when we consider for how long a time the Jewish people had been “mingled
“among the heathen,” and had “learned
“their works.”

If we regard the character and condition of the Jews at the time of their deliverance from Egypt, we shall readily allow, that the wisdom of God was eminently displayed in thus treating them as children in understanding. Brought up, as they had been, in the “house of bondage,” and sentenced by their imperious taskmasters to occupations of the lowest and most laborious kind, even from their earliest years—these were circumstances which had an obvious and necessary tendency to debilitate their intellectual powers: those powers had not been exercised and strengthened by education; and they were from habit addicted to the gross idolatry of the country in which they had lived. So debased indeed were their minds, so intent were they upon sensual

gratifications, that even after God had revealed himself to them, they were willing to renounce his service, and to return to their former slavery for the sake of enjoying the plenty of Egypt. So far were they from being able to receive the full light of Christianity, that they would not perhaps have been capable of attaining a just notion of those sublime representations of the Deity, which their own prophets afterwards communicated to their descendants. God might indeed have enabled them to rise superior to these moral and physical impediments to their religious improvement; he might have new formed their understandings purposely to receive these truths: but this, as we have remarked already, would not have been consistent with the original purpose of the Almighty, which was gradually to improve and refine man's nature, by the continued and increasing exercise of those faculties with which he was sent into the world. The method which he really did adopt was in perfect harmony with that purpose: he graciously condescended to the infirmities of his creatures, and accommodated his dispensations to their capacities; and therefore
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revealed himself to them in such a manner only, and to such a degree, as their intellectual powers could sufficiently comprehend. Again, the more refined and abstract doctrines of the Gospel would have borne a still greater disproportion to the moral and intellectual state of the Jews at the time of Moses, as well as for many ages afterwards. Had the humble condition and the sufferings of the Messiah been as plainly foretold by the Prophets, as they are narrated by the Evangelists; had they been taught to look forward to a crucified Redeemer, one who should undergo the severest degradation and the bitterest persecutions before he should enter into his glory; such a representation of the object of their hope would have alike offended their understanding and their feelings, and, so far from attaching them to the service of God, would probably have caused them to desert it for the idolatrous worship of some other nation, more intelligible to them, more suited to their carnal views and sensual dispositions.

The text gives us another and similar instance of the conduct of the all-wise God in

concealing certain important doctrines for a season, till the persons to whom they were to be revealed were duly qualified to receive them. And this instance may serve to confirm the reason which has been suggested, why the Jews were kept in ignorance of many of the essential doctrines of Christianity. "I have yet many things to say unto you," saith Christ to his Disciples, when he was about to leave them; "but ye cannot bear them now." Had he revealed those truths of which he spake, before their national prejudices were removed, and their views and conceptions enlarged, they would have proved serious stumbling-blocks in their way, and perhaps have endangered the stability of their faith. The Disciples had not as yet so thoroughly learned Christ, as to have entirely unlearned the Jew. Notwithstanding their Master's declaration, that his kingdom was not of this world, they still cherished the fond expectation of his appearing as a temporal Redeemer, who should break the bonds of Judæa in sunder, and place her foot upon the neck of the haughty mistress of the world. This expectation, though it must have been wofully damped at

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at his crucifixion, revived with his resurrection ; and it was this alone which prompted them to ask on the day of his ascension, “ Lord, wilt thou at this time restore the “ kingdom to Israel ? ” They could not yet therefore understand that their Master’s kingdom was of a spiritual and not of a temporal nature, and that the object of his coming was to save the souls of men, rather than to advance their earthly interests. They were therefore suffered to remain uninformed of these important truths, till their minds were duly fitted to receive them by the influence of the Holy Spirit.

To keep them stedfast in the belief of the divine unity and spirituality, was as much perhaps as was intended by all the revelations of speculative doctrines made to the Israelites : nor will this purpose appear unworthy of all the means which the Almighty made use of in effecting it, whether we consider their usual proneness to idolatry and polytheism, or the deleterious effects in practice which have been uniformly found accompanying these errors in belief. This has been suggested by an excellent Divine, as a reason why the doctrine of the Trinity,

which forms so interesting and essential a part of the orthodox Creed, was not revealed to the Jews, or at least is not to be so readily collected from the scriptures of the Old Testament, as it is from the uniform tenor of the Gospel. That the people of Israel, while they sojourned in Egypt, were inclined to idolatrous celebrations, and indulged polytheistic opinions, is a fact perfectly unquestionable. Their worship of the golden calf, during a temporary absence of their lawgiver, proves how deeply they had been tainted with these errors, how hardly they could be brought to renounce them, and how easily they relapsed into them on the first occasion that offered. Perhaps in no country, distinguished by any progress in civilization, had the rage of polytheism been carried to a greater extent than amongst the Egyptians, who had been accustomed to pay divine honours to some of the lower and meaner parts of the creation. Had the Jews therefore been taught by Moses, as Christians have been since in the Gospel, that in the Divine Essence were three distinct Persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, it is evident, that, circumstanced as they

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they were, this doctrine would have quickly been corrupted to sanction the most pernicious errors. “If,” says the writer above alluded to, “they so often fell into the notion of a plurality of Gods, in spite of all the precautions which Moses used to preserve them from it, what would have been the case, had their religion itself seemed to their gross and undistinguishing minds to sanction so fatal an error?”

It is however contended by some, that the more learned Jews in later times were not unacquainted with this doctrine; and it is certain, that Christians, assisted by the light of the Gospel, are enabled to collect some very strong proofs of it from the writings of Moses and the Prophets. But that the people at large were entirely without the notion of a Trinity is evident enough; and in the scheme of the divine nature delivered to them, they were not cautioned against confounding the Persons in the Godhead, lest, from the natural tendency of weak minds, they should fall into the opposite extreme of dividing the substance, which, according to their moral and intellectual state at the time, would

have proved to them the far more dangerous delusion.

The usual and necessary consequences of idolatry are justly and beautifully described in the Book of Wisdom, attributed to Solomon : “ Moreover, this was not enough for
“ them that they erred in the knowledge of
“ God ; but whereas they lived in the great
“ war of ignorance, those so great plagues
“ called they peace. For whilst they slew
“ their children in sacrifices, or used secret
“ ceremonies, or made revellings of strange
“ rites ; they kept neither lives nor mar-
“ riages any longer undefiled, but either one
“ slew another traitorously, or grieved him
“ by adultery. So that there reigned in all
“ men, without exception, blood, man-
“ slaughter, theft and dissimulation, corrup-
“ tion, unfaithfulness, tumults, perjury, dis-
“ quieting of good men, forgetfulness of
“ good turns, defiling of souls, changing of
“ kind, disorder in marriages, adultery, and
“ shameless uncleanness. For the worship-
“ ping of idols not to be named is the be-
“ ginning, the cause, and the end of all
“ evil.” (Wisd. Sol. xiv. 22.)

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Such is the character given of the natural tendency of idolatry: how well it is deserved may be proved from the slightest and most transient view we can take of the character of the heathen mythology. The histories of the Pagan deities, of whatever sex or station, almost universally minister the occasions of moral corruption. They perpetually disgust with their puerilities and enormities. We see nothing in them but a set of monsters in the shape of men, exercising with uncontrolled indulgence the lowest and vilest propensities of human nature: and in most cases, the powers attributed to them superior to man seem only to be employed in their becoming more mischievous than man. As the accounts of their actions are of the most absurd and incredible sort, so there are ascribed to them the most shocking impurities, the most grievous cruelties, the basest injustice: these enormities, as being the acts of beings supposed to be divine, men thought it impious to censure; they are related, some of them, with the utmost indifference, and others, even those of the most immoral kind, celebrated and adorned with all the splendor of poetic diction, and
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the memory of them preserved by images, by solemn edifices, and religious ceremonies. It is easy to conceive the effect which all this must have upon the feelings and conduct of the people at large, and more especially of the young : how soon would that modesty, which, as it is lovely in all, is an indispensable ornament to youth, be extinguished ! how speedy and how general must be the progress of immorality, when sanctioned by the example of the objects of religious adoration !

Again ; it was expedient that the doctrine of the spirituality of God should be impressed upon the minds of men from the earliest ages ; or rather that they should be led to collect so important a lesson from their being strictly forbidden to worship him under any material representation. At this day, and with the more correct notions which men now have received respecting the nature of the Deity, some men might be tempted to question the existence of such an absurdity amongst mankind, as the worship of graven or carved images, could they but forget for a moment, that the fact exists at present amongst nations which are in the
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same state of intellectual infirmity compared to us, as all the children of Adam were in the days of Moses. How prone the Jews were to idolatry at that time, both from their own depravity, and from the examples of the nations around them, may be gathered from the solemn import of the second Commandment: how ready they were to relapse into it in after-ages, when their reason might have shewn them the folly, as their religion had taught them the wickedness of such a practice, is abundantly proved by the language of invective and sarcasm, in which the Prophets addressed the worshippers of wood and stone. Therefore, considering the character of the Jews during the far greater part of their continuance as the select people of God, it was as necessary to warn them against the grievous sin of idolatry, as it would be unnecessary, unless in a figurative sense, to use the same admonitions to the enlightened Christian at present.

To represent the Creator by any material object, is infinitely to degrade his nature in the minds and conceptions of men: and that grossness which first inclined them to have

have recourse to such a representation of him, becomes gradually increased by the daily use of it. Allowing that the primary intention of such a practice was by visible images to awaken mankind more powerfully to the continued recollection of Him who is invisible ; yet there is every reason to fear, that in no long course of time the idea of a distinct invisible power will be lost, and the worshipper think only of the object about him, or, at least, that he will gradually persuade himself that the divine Being inhabits the statue which he has set up. Corrupt notions of the nature of God will necessarily lead to similar corruptions in men's conceptions of that mode of conduct which they think will be most pleasing to him. When man, presumptuous and depraved, takes upon him to make a God for himself, he will assuredly make him one after his own heart ; he will endow him with those qualities and attributes which are most favourable to the prevailing propensities of his own corrupted nature.

It has been remarked, that the fables of the heathen divinities are resolvable into the usual operations of physical causes, and are for
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the most part an allegorical description of that operation: and this circumstance has been urged in excuse of the puerilities and immoralities of the Pagan mythology. But still how weak a sense of moral decency must men have, how gross must be their conceptions, to have recourse for this purpose to representations of human follies and vices; to attribute to their divinities the exercise of the lowest animal propensities, and to consecrate that exercise by religious celebrations! Where shall we find, in the popular religion of the heathens, the Almighty set forth under the idea of holiness, as of eyes too pure to behold iniquity? Where shall we find any service offered to him worthy of a rational mind?

But their philosophers and learned men were superior to the low superstitions of the generality of their countrymen; they have also the merit of delivering many excellent lessons of purity and virtue. Undoubtedly: but this only serves to prove, that men's ideas become less gross and sensual, in proportion as they have discarded the absurdities of Paganism. The better conceptions, however, which these men had been enabled

bled to form of the divine nature, they prudently kept to themselves : they felt no sort of inclination to draw upon themselves the anger of the people, by attacking their most inveterate prejudices ; unambitious of the crown of martyrdom, they for the most part, and to all outward appearance, were content to sail quietly down the stream of popular error.

The genuine character of every system of belief and practice must, necessarily, be drawn from its effects upon those by whom it is most uniformly and unequivocally maintained, viz. the great mass of mankind ; and these are enough to convince us, that the indulgence of vicious propensities is a natural and essential consequence of idolatry.

Yet further : when men began to corrupt the original doctrine of the unity of God, and to multiply the objects of religious adoration, this was a circumstance which could not but contribute to weaken the sense of moral obligation and responsibility. It is of importance towards securing the steady and uniform obedience of man, that he believe in one supreme, one only God, whom
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he exclusively considers as his Creator, his Preserver, his Governor, and Benefactor: to whom alone he is indebted for every blessing which he enjoys, to whose goodness he looks for every thing which he hopes for, and to whom he is therefore bound in every obligation that can influence a reasonable creature. But the attention of the Polytheist is distracted, and his duty divided amongst a multitude of gods, of which many are considered as being of contrary natures, attributes, and habits, and consequently to whom very opposite modes of conduct must be supposed to be pleasing. The multiplicity also of the objects of religious belief and worship must necessarily tend to introduce the substitution of outward observances, in the place of those inward feelings of regard and veneration, which we are taught can alone render our devotional exercises acceptable to the Being to whom they are presented. The heart of man is not calculated long to contain many objects which claim a superior interest in its affections. The believer in a multitude of divinities will find it impossible to preserve for all of them, during any considerable period,

riod, those sentiments of inward reverence, which, as he has been taught, and might really believe, do belong to them. His devotion, with regard to some of the objects of it, must quickly subside into mere oral expressions, and external testimonies of respect. And as it is infinitely more easy to shew regard outwardly, than to cherish the feeling of it inwardly, the principle adopted in one instance will gradually be extended to all; and it is true for the most part, that the fancied divinities of the heathens were worshipped and honoured not by the sacrifice of a pure mind and virtuous life, but by external ceremonies and celebrations, which were commonly ridiculous, and frequently impure. The due performance of these rites was conceived sufficient to cleanse them from the pollution of the greatest guilt; and after the stated ablutions and purifications, the most licentious and immoral character was fitted to present himself before the altars of the gods.

On a due consideration of the whole we shall find, that fear was the prevailing motive in the religious systems of idolatrous nations; a principle which is naturally calculated,

culated, when not accompanied and tempered by other feelings, to debase the nature of man, and to prevent the just improvement of his moral and intellectual character. For the deities of most Pagan nations are represented as harsh and oppressive taskmasters, as beings that were interested in the services of mankind, and ready to inflict the heaviest vengeance upon their votaries, whenever their temples should be neglected, or the provision of their altars abridged. In the characters of the least unamiable of them, how little do we see of that fatherly love towards mankind, that carefulness to supply their wants, that pity of their infirmities, and that long-suffering with their offences, which so amiably characterize the God of Israel !

I shall, perhaps, be thought to have digressed too much upon this article, especially as the contrast between the Mosaic and Christian systems, and that of Paganism, in regard to the different views they have given of the nature of the Deity, and the consequent incitements to virtuous action, has been so often and so ably exhibited. But the argument which arises from hence,

however trite, is amongst the most powerful that can be urged in defence of Revelation ; and particularly deserves the attention of the younger part of my hearers, whose duty it is, and to whose everlasting interest it will be, to employ their present opportunities in investigating every proof of the divine origin of that religion in which they have been brought up, and which they will hereafter be called upon to adorn and defend. Consistently, however, with the nature of my subject, the use which I would now principally make of reverting to the character and consequences of idolatry and polytheism, is to vindicate the wisdom and the goodness of God, displayed in the various means he has made use of to guard his chosen people from those degrading and seductive errors.

To instruct and improve mankind, to lead them on, by successive stages of discipline, to the exercise and display of those faculties which form the truest exaltation of their character, was, as we have seen, the continued object of all the dealings of the Almighty with his creatures. It was in conformity with this design, and to save the Israelites from plunging into the degrading super-

superstitions of their idolatrous neighbours, that so strong a fence was formed about the doctrine of the divine unity and spirituality ; a wall of fire, which should consume them if they passed over from the service of Jehovah, to the adoration of Moloch and Baal ; that other doctrines equally true were concealed from them for a time, till they were better prepared to receive them, till there was the less prospect of their abusing them to their own corruption : and therefore the many severe marks of divine vengeance which they were allowed to inflict upon the idolatrous nations about them, and the dreadful punishments which were the consequence of their own frequent relapses ; these, however misunderstood and misrepresented, are justifiable on the ground of the effect intended, and which in process of time actually was produced by them : they were the merciful and timely chastisements of a most wise and affectionate Father, ever anxiously watchful over the welfare of his creatures, and uniformly liberal of the means which could best contribute to advance the great ends of their creation.

In the wide scene of divine knowledge

which is laid open to the enraptured view of the disciple of Jesus Christ, there is no part of it which more strongly interests him, or which he prizes at a higher rate, than the Gospel doctrine of a future and eternal state. Here are centered the most animating motives to his obedience, and the most favourite objects of his hope. The Gospel has done more than any other form of religion had or could do towards improving the human character, by declaring, in a manner sufficiently explicit and authoritative, that our present life forms a part of our existence infinitely insignificant, if we consider its continuance, but of infinite value and importance, when viewed in regard to its future consequences; that we are creatures destined for immortal life; that our present conduct has a close and inseparable connection with our future prospects; and that according as we have used or neglected the light now held out to us, according as we have obeyed or transgressed the laws of the Most High, shall our condition throughout a whole eternity be determined.

These are motives to decide the moral conduct of the Christian, which had little or
nothing

nothing to do awakening the hopes and influencing the practice of the ancient people of God. That the doctrine of a future state was not entirely unknown to mankind under the primeval and patriarchal dispensations, is a point which we are ready enough to allow : what we contend is, that it was not proposed to them, neither did it operate as the means of their labouring more earnestly in the way of their Creator's commandments. In those early ages of the world, when the minds of men were entirely employed about present and earthly objects ; while they were destitute of those powers of abstraction, which are only to be acquired by much intellectual cultivation ; temporal motives were found to be most effectual in making them obedient to the laws of their Creator, and contribute to the furtherance of his eternal purposes. Long life, abundance of worldly blessings, flocks and herds, silver and gold, man-servants and maid-servants, and to leave behind him a numerous and flourishing progeny, comprehended the whole of the Patriarch's wishes, and was the usual value at which he pledged his services to his heavenly Sovereign.

Whatever notices were imparted to them of a future state, were rather given indirectly and incidentally, and not so much intended to animate their obedience, or to comfort them under their labours at the time, as to become the means of instruction to their remote descendants, who would thus have a considerable addition of strength made to their faith in Christ, by remarking at what early periods of the world His coming was prophesied, who should overcome the sharpness of death, and open the kingdom of heaven to all believers.

In a more advanced state of the world, and when some ideas of this kind prevailed, from whatever source they were derived, the omission of the sanctions which the doctrine of future rewards and punishments is found to give every system of moral conduct, strikes us at first sight as something very singular and remarkable in the Mosaic dispensation. In the law which was given by the Almighty to the Jews, through the ministry of Moses, we observe all the motives to obedience, all the specified punishments and rewards, to be entirely of a temporal nature ; none of those sanctions are
added,

added, which the Gospel furnishes to us, and which we justly consider as of higher importance, and more enlarged efficacy.

An eminent and original writer has maintained, that this sanction was purposely omitted, in order to shew, that the authority of the Mosaic law was supported in a miraculous manner by the interposition of the Almighty. His argument is this: No human institution could be maintained without such a sanction, and therefore all other lawgivers have had recourse to it. Moses established his law without this sanction, and it continued for many ages, notwithstanding it wanted such a support; and therefore it must have been maintained by the immediate interposition of God himself: for without such an interposition, Moses could not have executed the declaration which he made to the Israelites at the promulgation of his law, that temporal rewards and punishments should be the certain and uniform consequences of their obedience and disobedience.

But there is an objection to this ingenious solution of the problem, which seems almost insurmountable. It is necessary for the sup-

port of the argument, that the Jews should be *entirely* ignorant of a future state ; for if they were not, their hopes and fears, excited by the knowledge of such a state, would operate in some measure as a sanction to their law, although that doctrine were not explicitly delivered in it. But that they were not totally destitute of such knowledge may be shewn from several passages of Scripture, and particularly from the Epistle to the Hebrews. The argument therefore is fallacious.

The true reason, perhaps, for this remarkable omission might be this : the covenant made by God with the Jews was a national covenant : no eternal rewards or punishments could, consistently with the divine attributes, be dispensed to a nation collectively. Temporal rewards and punishments therefore must be the only sanctions of which the nature of the Mosaic covenant could admit. This was also agreeable to the imperfect nature and limited extent of the Jewish dispensation. The Christian covenant is founded, as the Apostle tells us, on better promises : it is a covenant of a spiritual nature made with a Church gathered

thered out of all nations, and therefore eternal rewards and punishments were its most suitable sanctions.

The promulgation of the Gospel of Christ is to be considered as a new and most important æra in the progressive improvement of the moral and intellectual condition of mankind. They were now considered as grown up out of that state of childhood which regards the present only, which thinks not of the past, nor looks forward to the future; as being sufficiently strengthened to walk by faith, and not by sight; as regarding the things which are not seen, rather than the things which are seen; for “the things which are seen are temporal, “but the things which are not seen are “eternal.”

In regarding the general improvement of man's nature, through the progressive operation of the Patriarchal, Mosaic, and Christian revelations, the parallel between the growth of the individual from infancy to manhood of intellect, and that of the species taken collectively, is beautifully illustrated.

The existence of God is one of the earliest lessons which the child is taught, and the full-

full-grown man often smiles at his gross and fanciful conceptions of the nature of that all-perfect Being : but the notions which the Patriarchs and the Jews in general entertained of him were hardly less weak and puerile ; it is for them only who have grown up into the perfect measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ, to have just and worthy notions of their heavenly Creator. The child is necessarily subject to much restraint and confinement, which cannot but be irksome and unpleasing to him, and engaged in studies, the usefulness of which he cannot as yet discover. He is occasionally chastised for sins of omission and transgression ; and yet to tell him that these chastisements are intended for his good, is to speak a language perfectly unintelligible to him. Apply this to the condition of the Jews under the Mosaic covenant. How little did they seem to know of the real nature and intent of the laws enjoined them, of the rules and ordinances which they were required to observe, or of the inflictions of Almighty justice with which they were occasionally visited ! But by taking the New Testament into our hand, the best and only inter-

interpreter of the Old, we can see clearly the meaning of things which by them were hard and even impossible to be understood : we can discover Almighty wisdom and goodness constantly operating for the improvement and final perfection of his creatures. Again, the child, unable to look forward beyond the things which are present with him, must be kept to his duty by the dread of immediate punishment, or the hope of immediate reward : such was the institution of the people whom the Almighty selected for the accomplishment of his gracious purposes towards the whole world. But the enlightened Christian, grown up into strength and maturity of intellect, counts as nothing the riches, the pleasures, and the honours of this present world, when compared with that state of happiness and glory with which his Saviour has promised to reward his obedience in the world to come.

What glorious and exalted views does the Gospel of Jesus Christ open to the eyes of mankind ! amid the pursuits and occupations of life, what animating encouragements does it hold out to our religious industry ! what a fund of the most substantial comfort

comfort does it supply amid the labours and the sorrows of our earthly existence, when it tells us that thus are we to render ourselves worthy of inheriting a state of endless glory and unspeakable happiness ! We are not told indeed in precise and definite terms what shall be the condition or employment of the blessed in heaven. Such a degree of knowledge is more than our faculties could bear now, and is more than is necessary to the direction of our present conduct. It is sufficient if we know in general, that the same progressive system will operate in the improvement of our nature during eternity, which has hitherto operated in time ; that our faculties continually enlarging will have a continued succession of new and more noble subjects of employment ; and the human mind, going on from strength to strength, shall never arrive at that pitch of satiety, when it may relax its activity, and lament that no more remains to be learned. If we make a due use of the opportunities which are here assigned us, we are assured that we shall be admitted into a more close union with our Creator, that no small portion of our happiness will consist in the study of his
infinite

infinite perfections : a task which can never be finished in time, and must therefore be the business of an eternity. For after millions of millions of ages shall have passed by, the subject of praise and adoration will still continue unexhausted ; fresh occasions will continually present themselves of acknowledging the power, the wisdom, and the goodness of God, the sum of whose perfections can be comprehended only by HIMSELF.

SERMON IV.

JOHN iv. 23, 24.

But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth; for the Father seeketh such to worship him.

God is a spirit; and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.

IN the preceding Discourse we attempted a survey of the gradual impartition of divine knowledge to mankind, in strict conformity with their advancement in moral and intellectual strength. We remarked the wisdom of the Almighty in revealing himself to them no more fully than their faculties could bear at the time, and withholding from them much important communication, till there should no longer be any danger of its becoming to them a snare, and the means of their falling into the errors in belief

lief and corruptions in practice of their idolatrous neighbours.

We come next to regard the existence and efficacy of such a design, in the different forms of religious worship prescribed by the Almighty to mankind at different periods of their history, more especially under the Mo-
saic and Christian dispensations. What can form a more complete and remarkable contrast than the splendid and operose ceremonies appointed by the Jewish legislator, and that simplicity of worship which is the distinguishing characteristic of the Gospel of Christ! And yet either system is alike of divine origin, and by recurring to the idea upon which we have hitherto proceeded, we shall find that the wisdom of the Most High is equally discernible in the appointment of each. His benevolent purposes could not otherwise have been advanced without a violation of that plan which he appears to have adopted from the beginning. And before men presume to be scandalized at the difference observable in the divine proceedings in either case, they must prove, what we know to be impossible, that a mode of worship as abstracted and spiritual

as that prescribed in the Gospel, was as well suited to the carnal views and gross affections of the Israelites, as well calculated for their instruction, as the more sensible and magnificent rites appointed by Moses.

Was man composed of somewhat purer materials than he is at present, and was his material part in constant and absolute subjection to his mind, prescribed forms would not be wanted to awaken religious adoration : the feelings of thankfulness and regard would be ever alive and active ; and the works of God exhibited in the visible creation, the greater from their splendour and magnificence, and the lesser from their beauty and usefulness, would supply an unceasing theme of praise and thanksgiving. But man, the creature of sense, the slave of worldly affections, has need of louder and more distinct calls, to stir him up to a reverential remembrance of his Creator : he wants to be reminded from without, more frequently than his own inward feelings would remind him, of his dependence upon, and his obligations to, his Creator. For this purpose there must be settled forms, and places, and seasons of religious worship : a

strong application must be made to his senses ; and the communication with Him who is eternal and unseen must be kept up by means of the things which are seen and are temporal. Hence, in the earlier and ruder ages of the world, a mode of worship was prescribed to men, which tended most powerfully to excite their attention by applying to their external senses : and hence too, even in our present improved state, something of the kind is still found expedient ; some outward observances, however few and simple, are enjoined, as being necessarily instrumental to our improvement, under a system of religion which teaches us that “ God is a spirit ; and that they that “ worship him must worship him in spirit “ and in truth.”

By these words our blessed Saviour meant to intimate to the woman of Samaria, that an entire and important revolution was about to take place, by divine appointment, in the form and manner of worshipping the supreme Being. “ Our fathers worshipped “ in this mountain ; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to “ worship.” This difference in opinion and
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in practice, respecting the particular place where prayer and sacrifice should be offered up to the Almighty Governor of the universe, had occasioned the bitterest and most implacable enmity between the Jews and Samaritans; the one attached to the practice of the ancient patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and the other pleading, with a greater shew of reason, the obligation and authority of a later and more definite appointment of God. The woman, perceiving that he who talked with her was gifted with more than human knowledge, makes the observation to him with the view perhaps of learning from him, whether of the two places was more immediately the residence of holiness, and rendered the services of the worshippers more acceptable to the Almighty. But Jesus, in his usual dignified and impressive manner, informs her, that the time was hastily approaching, and even then was, when no longer any exclusive sanctity should be attached to mount Gerizim of the Samaritans, or the magnificent temple of Jerusalem: that the whole earth should be filled with the glory of the Lord, and all mankind taught to honour

him, by a mode of worship less fascinating to the senses of men, but more indicative of their real improvement in righteousness, and therefore more agreeable to the object of their devotions, than either the splendid ordinances of the Mosaic ritual, or the ruder and half idolatrous observances of the Samaritans.

The haughty philosopher, in surveying the various forms of religious worship which have prevailed in the world, either amongst the ancient heathens, or uncivilized nations in more modern times, turns aside from the picture which they present to him, disgusted by the puerilities, and occasionally shocked with the enormities which have been interwoven with their religious solemnities. So far perhaps we may safely consent with him: but we can by no means accede to the very daring conclusions, which are sometimes drawn from thence, against the divine origin and authority of all religious impressions whatsoever. The Christian, whatever might be his other feelings, at observing by what strange means mankind have conceived they should engage the protection of their Creator, yet knows better than to argue from
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the corruptions of religion against religion itself: he feels a degree of veneration for the relics of ancient tradition wherever they are to be found, and of pity for the absurdities and improprieties in which they are retained: he remarks how congenial to mankind in general is that great and important truth, the existence of a supreme Being, and the obligation to render him worship and service; and that the original idea, though perverted and weakened, continually exists; though darkened by the pollutions of sin and error, is at no time entirely hidden.

In the systems of ancient worship, an observance the most general in its extent, and the most lasting in its continuance, was that of animal sacrifice: an observance so very singular in its nature, so little obvious, as we should imagine, to the common feelings of mankind, that we are at a loss how to account for its primary institution, without referring to the absolute appointment of God. We find it prevailing at so very early a period in the history of the world, during times of the most frequent and familiar intercourse between men and their Creator, whilst they were yet under his most immediate guidance

and direction, and before the devices of human invention could well have been introduced into the forms of adoring the Most High, that no other account of its rise seems admissible.

The objections against the divine origin of animal sacrifice proceed upon different ideas of the Godhead, from those which the revealed history of his dealings with mankind present to us ; as if the Almighty in the infancy of the world withdrew his personal communications (so to speak) from his creatures, when they stood in most need of them, as he does at present, when that necessity no longer exists. It is urged, that we admit too low and gross an idea of the Almighty, when we suppose that he should be within the reach of good offices from his creatures, that it was possible he could receive benefit from or be pleased with them. But this is going much too far : faint and earthly as were the conceptions of the divine nature, which men in the primæval times were enabled to form ; yet it does not appear that such a notion was allowed to be generally entertained. If there was any tendency in men to fall into so degrading an error, we
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may conceive it but natural that their divine Instructor would admonish them then, as we know he did in the ages afterwards; “Think-
 “est thou that I will eat bulls’ flesh, or drink
 “the blood of goats? If I be hungry, I will
 “not tell thee; for the whole earth is mine,
 “and the fulness thereof.” As to his being pleased with the offerings of his people, that is another question: the institution being of his appointment, he cannot, according to our ideas of him, but be pleased with their obedience; because all of his appointments were intended, in his infinite wisdom and goodness, for the improvement and advantage of his creatures. And the objection, if taken in its full extent, and according to its legitimate tendency, would be as conclusive against any form of religious worship under the notion of its being pleasing to the object of it, as against the performance of sacrifice with that view: and this has been a very favourite topic with some unbelievers in modern times, who have urged, that the common acts of devotion, prayer, praise, and thanksgiving, which are considered by the Christian as indispensable parts of his daily conduct, all proceed

upon a notion derogating from the perfections of God ; upon a supposition that infinite justice can be relaxed, or infinite goodness quickened, by human means ; that any addition could be made to the happiness of God by the acts of adoration, and expressions of thankfulness of his weak and ignorant creatures. But this is a most glaring perversion of the sentiments which animate Christian devotion : we hold none of those notions which are considered as derogating from the divine perfections ; we act merely in obedience to the directions of our Almighty Creator ; and we have an additional motive to continue the practice from a sensible experience of the good effects resulting from it to ourselves ; and all beyond this is useless, and oftentimes dangerous refinement.

What a cold and joyless system is that, which, under the pretence of giving a purer and more correct notion of the Almighty, would represent him to us in a less amiable and interesting point of view, and would endeavour to weaken that constant communication of man with his Creator, which is found by long experience to be the best encouragement

couragement to his virtue, the sweetest solace of his affliction, and the firmest foundation of his hopes.

Sacrifice was a sensible and material rite ; it was therefore best suited to the capacities of mankind in their earlier state, when their comprehensions were unfit for the reception of other than gross and sensible objects. In the primitive ages of the world, it does not appear that men enquired, or were capable of understanding all the intentions of the Almighty, in the ordinances which he prescribed to them. They knew and felt his power over them ; and this was as strong a motive to their obedience as could then be effectually applied. To Adam, as well as to his earlier descendants, the institution might have served to set forth the heinous nature, and the fatal consequences, of the first transgression of the laws of God ; they might have considered it as the means of obtaining his favour by the due performance of it ; and perhaps some indistinct information might have been given them of its remote application to the future restoration of mankind, and their advancement to a higher state of glory and felicity than that which they had
lost

lost by that transgression : but this was more than they were well able to comprehend at the time, and therefore was an insufficient motive to general obedience : and many ages afterwards, when their descendants had been enlightened by several successive communications of divine knowledge, it baffled even the acuteness and eloquence of an inspired Apostle to convince them that the sacrifices appointed under the Patriarchal and Mosaic dispensations were of no value in themselves, but as they were typical and declaratory of that great sacrifice which Christ should one day offer up, as a full and sufficient atonement for the sins of the world.

Men therefore err most egregiously, when they regard the rite of sacrifice in its obvious and literal sense ; when they overlook the general intentions of the Almighty for the progressive improvement of his creatures ; when they do not consider the rite in question as one of the means used for the furtherance of that benevolent purpose ; as one of the numerous expedients resorted to in order to secure men's obedience to the laws of their Creator ; as an instance, among many others, of his treating them as they required

quired to be treated, not as men, but as children in understanding; whom it was necessary to prepare, by institutions suited to the state of childhood, for the due reception of that sublime display of heavenly mercy, which should be made to them, when they arrived at the condition of intellectual manhood.

In considering the different forms of worship enjoined to mankind at different periods, it will be proper to place them in two principal points of view: I. as suited to the political state of the worshippers; and, II. as preparatory to, or commemorative of, the coming of Jesus Christ.

I. 1. Under the Patriarchal dispensation they were few in number, and simple in their kind, adapted to the feelings and comprehensions of men in the earlier ages of human history. Whilst yet the world was peopled with but few inhabitants, before the forms of life became multiplied, and civil institutions had attained any remarkable growth, mankind seemed to be divided into families, as little connected with or dependent upon one another, as distinct states and kingdoms are at present. We read indeed of towns and cities being built;
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but the ancient Patriarchs, to whom more especially were divine revelations made, appear not to have had any fixed and settled residence, but to have wandered about with their families, their flocks, and their herds, as their present circumstances required, and as the appointments of God determined them. One leading idea in the Patriarchal dispensation seems to have been, to impress the people of God with a strong and continued sense of their absolute and immediate dependence upon their heavenly Sovereign, and thus to establish what has been called the Theocracy. This was therefore one object of all the changes of residence which Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were ordered to make at different periods ; this was one reason why they were never suffered to have any constant and permanent habitation. And evident traces of the same design appear in the subsequent history of the Jews. Another reason, as we took occasion to observe in a former discourse, was, to carry on the designs of Almighty God in gradually diffusing the seeds of divine knowledge among the Gentiles ; which, as they grew up, though overshadowed and starved for a time by the intermixture and predominance of rank and gross errors,

errors, prepared the soil for the future cultivation of Christianity.

Whilst therefore the earlier depositaries of divine truth continued in this unfixed and unsettled state, the system of religious celebration and the forms of religious worship were such as would best agree with such a state. There was no particular spot expressly set apart for the purpose of performing the rite of sacrifice, and offering up prayers and thanksgivings ; there was no peculiar order of men selected to officiate at the altar, and to conduct and regulate the devotion of the people, to make known the will of the Lord unto them, to humble them into contrition, or to elevate them into religious joy. The head of the family was the priest, and wheresoever he was stationed with his family, there could divine worship with equal effect and convenience be performed : whether Abraham was in Egypt or in Canaan, he could equally well offer up prayer and adoration to that Almighty Being who had promised to be his “ shield and his exceeding “ great reward,” and that “ in his seed “ should all the generations of the earth be “ blessed.”

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This however must be understood with some degree of reserve and limitation : for there were occasionally raised up some men of more than ordinary sanctity, and to whom a greater portion of the knowledge of God was entrusted : they had therefore a degree of veneration attached to them out of their own families, and were listened to whilst they unfolded the oracles of the Most High to large assemblies. Of these the first upon record is the pious and holy Enoch, who “ prophesied ” to his brethren ; that is, in all probability, he performed the same office amongst his contemporaries which the Christian preacher discharges at present : he proclaimed the will of God to mankind ; he detailed to them his several dealings with his creatures, from the beginning of the world ; and exhorted them in the most earnest manner to obedience, by setting before them the fatal and certain consequences of rebellion and disobedience. Such an one was also the venerable Melchisedec, of whom indeed we read but little in the Scriptures ; but that little is of so interesting a kind, that we cannot but regret the want of a more complete information. His name appears to us en-

circled

circled with an awful but indistinct glory. He is described as a priest of the Most High God ; and what, in our regards, claims a higher portion of our veneration, he was a type and figure of the future Redeemer of mankind. In consequence of his prophetic and sacerdotal character, an extraordinary degree of respect appears to have been shewn to him ; and to him, as to a superior, did Abraham himself pay the tithes of the spoil which he brought with him, when he returned victorious from the overthrow of the confederate kings. The sacred historian also tells us that he “ blessed Abraham : ” a greater therefore than Abraham was here : for authoritative benedictions imply superiority, and “ without all contradiction,” says the Apostle, “ the less is blessed of the “ greater.”

But the general course of religious worship was maintained as we have already seen : the father was both the temporal governor and the spiritual instructor of his family. And perhaps there is nothing which forms a more pleasing and interesting picture of the primæval times, than the Patriarch surrounded by his numerous descendants,

ants, and employed in the daily office of devotion ; in the morning imploring strength to support them through the labours of the day, and at night returning thanks for the succour and protection they had received ; and, on less frequent but more solemn occasions, recounting to them the history of the wondrous things of God, as they had known them from their own experience, and from the traditions of their forefathers ; and thence deducing the most powerful arguments for the regulation of their lives and actions, agreeably to the will of Him who had uniformly shewn himself equally disposed and able to reward the obedience, and to punish the disobedience, of his creatures.

2. But “ when Israel came up out of “ Egypt, and the house of Jacob from among a strange people, Judah was his “ sanctuary, and Israel his dominion.” When the Jews were embodied as a nation, and were to be permanently fixed in a country peculiarly appropriated to them, then, consistently with the uniformity of divine wisdom, a very different system of divine worship was appointed to them : a place was chosen, that God might “ put his name “ there,”

“ there,” and where alone sacrifices were to be offered. A particular order of men was appointed to officiate in the sacred rites, and with a peculiar preciseness of limitation that order was appropriated to a peculiar family. This last circumstance has been frequently subjected to the contemptuous animadversion of the unbeliever ; but, when taken in one particular point of view, it contributes not a little to the conviction, that the Jewish dispensation was of God. “ Considering how
“ closely the whole Jewish policy was inter-
“ woven with those acts of religion which
“ were to be performed by the priests alone,
“ it might seem wonderful that no provision
“ at all should be made for entailing the
“ priesthood on any other family, if that
“ of Aaron should happen to be extinct.
“ Leaving this contingency unprovided for
“ was, in effect, putting the whole credit of
“ the Jewish religion upon the perpetual
“ continuance of the male branches of that
“ family ; an issue upon which no man of
“ Moses’s prudence, or even of common pru-
“ dence, would have rested his legislation,
“ had he not been truly conscious of its di-
“ vine origin : especially too, after two of the
“ four sons of Aaron had been cut off in one
“ day

“ day for a rash and profane act in the
“ execution of their office, and died as soon
“ as they were initiated into it.”

When it pleased the Almighty to confine his revelation to one particular people, the appointment of a distinct place of worship, and of a separate order of men to preside at devotional exercises, was admirably well adapted to the furtherance of those purposes which he thereby intended. It tended to keep them more firmly united with one another, and to hinder them from forming connexions with the wicked and idolatrous nations around them. The temple at Jerusalem was the centre of union to all the children of Abraham; there was the residence of the Levitical priesthood, and thither were all the people of the Jews, even the most remote inhabitants of Judæa, obliged to repair at stated periods of peculiar solemnity.

Considering the gracious designs of the Almighty in selecting to himself this remarkable people, and dividing them into separate tribes, which were to be uniformly kept distinct from one another, it is consistent that every plan should be adopted, which could keep them from the contamination of Gentile admixture. The promised Redeemer of
mankind

mankind was to spring from the seed of Abraham : it was afterwards foretold that he should be of the house of Judah, and in process of time he was limited to the lineage of David : it was necessary therefore that every precaution should be taken by the separation of the Jewish nation in general, and their peculiar classification among one another, to convince them, that, when Christ really should appear upon the earth, the prophecy of his human origin was correctly fulfilled.

There are many of the Mosaic institutions, which seem, upon a gross and superficial view of them, to have little or no connexion with religion, or morals, or policy ; and against these the cavils and objections of the infidel are chiefly directed : he cannot comprehend why a pure and perfect God should enjoin such a multitude of rites and precepts, that have no moral excellence in them, and which appear to promote neither the honour of God, nor the advantage of his creatures. But this, like many other objections, is founded upon the mistaken idea that the people of Israel were as forward in intellectual and moral improvement, as men under the influence of the Gospel are at present. He

does not consider the peculiar circumstances of the Israelitish people at this period of their history, nor the purposes which the Almighty intended to execute by their instrumentality. To make separate parts of his proceedings the subject of review, without regarding their reference and subserviency to one great whole, is the source of the greatest and most pernicious errors. These men want to be continually reminded, that the improvement of mankind under the constant and uniform care of God, is a design which has been carrying on from the creation of the world to the present time ; that he willed the performance of such a design to be gradual, and to our perception flow ; that the separation of the Jewish people was a principal and effective part of that design ; and that to continue this separation was the object of most of those preceptive rites which they regard with such sarcastic contempt, and hold up at every turn to the derision of their readers.

The Israelites were gathered out of a wicked and idolatrous people, with whose errors they seem to have been deeply infected : they were surrounded on all sides by nations who were sunk in the most degrading

ing superstitions, and addicted to every immoral excess of which superstition is the legitimate parent. It was necessary therefore that they, to whom the oracles of God were committed for a time, should be defended in the strongest manner against the inroads of such fatal notions and degrading practices ; and if the means made use of for this purpose were generally effectual, as we have every reason to believe they were, who shall dare to object to the wisdom of their application at that time, however unnecessary and ridiculous their adoption would be at present, when the circumstances, and the wants, and the faculties of mankind are so widely different ?

The Jews, like the rest of mankind in the childhood of the species, were a gross and carnal people ; they were grovelling in their affections, and easily led captive by their senses. It was not the Almighty's design, as we have seen already, to new-create his people, on selecting them as such, by giving them new faculties and new perfections ; but to purify and improve such as they already possessed. In conformity with this design, the means which he makes use of are intended

tended to work in a gradual and imperceptible manner ; and they are kept from partaking in the enormities of the nations around them, by methods not apparently fitted, nor expressly intended for this purpose. This seems to be particularly the case with the prohibitory injunctions of Moses, which to a superficial observer might appear arbitrary and unmeaning : many practices are forbidden, which seem innocent at least, and not at all connected with the means of moral depravity. But it is more than probable that all of these had a direct reference to superstitious customs which prevailed in the days of Moses, and were therefore intended to guard the Israelites from adopting them. Such a reference has in many instances been satisfactorily made out : in others it is not now to be discovered, because of many of the practices of remote antiquity we must at this day be necessarily ignorant. But if we can in some instances vindicate the wisdom of those ordinances from the circumstances of the times when, and the character of the persons to whom, they were prescribed ; it will surely be unreasonable to condemn them in others, where we cannot now have equal

equal evidence of their wisdom and experience.

From the authoritative imposition of the Mosaic rules of worship, and the firm hold which they gradually took upon them, the Jews were kept an unmixed and separate people, a purpose full of wise and benevolent intention; and from the difference of customs in the most essential parts of human conduct, the Gentiles became an abomination to the Israelites, and the Israelites an abomination unto them. No other means, equally effectual, could have been adopted. Idolatry accompanied by sensual gratification presented too strong a temptation to a carnal people like the Jews: the points of disunion therefore between them could not be too far multiplied. For considering their condition and character, in the earlier periods of their history, it is reasonably to be supposed that the most eloquent and profound harangue which a modern Deist could make to them upon the Unity of God, and the turpitude of idolatry and polytheism, would have been totally lost upon them; or at least, that its effects would have been in-

stantly effaced by one libidinous glance from the idolatrous daughters of Midian.

To return : we have seen that the specific appointment of one general place of worship, and the appropriation of one particular family to preside at the altar, and conduct the devotions of the people, was an arrangement peculiarly well adapted to a national religion, as the patriarchal scheme was to the case of independent and unsettled families. But this could obtain only whilst the Church was confined to one country and to one people; and therefore,

3. When the Church was to be composed of worshippers gathered out of all nations, the limited dispensation of Moses, having effected the purposes for which it was intended, and brought forward to maturity the plans of Almighty wisdom, was abolished. Under the new dispensation of the Gospel, in the benefits of which all the generations of the earth are called, without reserve, to be partakers, no particular city could be any longer the stated place of worship, or the more favoured residence of divine holiness : and though the order of
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the priesthood was still enjoined to be continued, it was no longer possible, nor was it necessary if it were possible, that the order should be confined to one particular family.

Thus have the forms of worship at particular periods been adapted to the existing political circumstances of the Church.

But, II. They may be considered as preparatory to the coming of Christ, and commemorative of the many and great benefits which his ministry and death have secured to mankind.

1. As preparatory to his coming : the worship of the patriarchs in one very essential part of it was, as we have already observed, typical and descriptive of some future event, which should be the occasion of some most essential and lasting blessings to their remote posterity. The worship prescribed to the Jews partook much more largely of this character. In every type, there must be something addressed to the senses ; and hence arose the multiplicity of sacrifices and ceremonies, and the captivating pageantry of worship among the Jews. It would seem to be a notion derogating from the wisdom of him

him who “doeth nothing in vain,” to refer the Jewish institutions, which were of his own immediate appointment, to the carnal views and earthly dispositions of that people; as if their religious ceremonies were designed for their amusement only, like shows and exhibitions for the amusement of children. That the Jews were but children in point of understanding, compared with the human character at present; that they were, generally speaking, a sensual and gross-judging people, is a truth we must never lose sight of, because it furnishes the only principle upon which we can ground the wisdom and propriety of the Almighty’s proceedings towards them. But it is much more consistent with the reverential idea which we ought always to entertain of the divine institutions, that they had also a higher and much nobler aim; that they were intended to elevate their views to a degree of spirituality, rather than to cherish them in their original grossness.

It is hardly necessary, neither would there be time at present, to enter into a wide and specific detail of the several kinds of sacrifices and other religious ceremonies of the
Mosaic

Mosaic dispensation, and to remark in what a variety of minute particulars they were declaratory of that great event, which has bruised the serpent's head, and restored life and immortality to mankind. Whilst the law continued in its full vigour and efficacy, this was a reference of its sacrificial ordinances, indistinctly seen by some, and entirely hidden from the generality. That they looked forward to a future Redeemer, is true; but how incorrect their notions of him were, and how little connected with the real character prefigured in their daily worship, is evident from their supposing that he should come in earthly glory to exercise earthly dominion. But when the veil was taken away from the hearts of the chosen instructors of the world, and when, guided by the Holy Spirit, they examined the Scriptures of truth, what a blaze of heavenly light at once burst in upon them! How did they feel their faith in the divine mission of Christ confirmed, and their hopes in his eternal protection exalted, when they beheld in the person of the crucified Jesus of Nazareth, Him who was the subject of consolatory promise to their parents immediately after
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the fall ; who had been foretold in the writings of the prophets, and portrayed in the Mosaic sacrifices ! “ The very Paschal
“ Lamb which was offered for them and for
“ all mankind, who by his death had de-
“ stroyed death, and by his rising again had
“ restored to them life everlasting.”

2. As commemorative of the many and great benefits, which the mission and death of Christ have secured to mankind.

The ceremonial law of Moses, having only a “ shadow of good things to come,” passed away when those great and eternal benefits, of which it was figurative, were openly proclaimed to mankind : it was abrogated by the same authoritative voice from heaven which pointed out Jesus, the well-beloved Son of the Father, as the future object of faith, hope, and obedience. Its pompous rites and multiplied observances made way for the introduction of a much less complex and more spiritual system of religious celebration, suitable to the purer conceptions which men were now enabled to form of their heavenly Father, the clearer views which were given them of the great end of their creation, and the proportionably greater aids
· vouchsafed

vouchsafed them towards arriving at it. The true disciple of Christ is not admitted into communion with his Maker, like the Jew to a participation in the benefits of the law, by a gross and carnal rite, but by a ceremony equally simple and significant: he bears about him no visible and fleshly mark of his adoption; but is known unto all men as a follower of his divine Master, by the constant and active exercise of benevolent feelings towards his fellow-creatures: he is not called upon for the performance of continual sacrifices, faintly expressive of a Redeemer to come; but to join with pious awe and thankfulness in commemorating that one great and sufficient sacrifice, which Christ has offered up for the sins of the whole world. He needs no magnificent temples, the work of men's hands, to remind him of the existence of his Creator, and of his own dependance upon him; but feels him in his heart by the operation of his Holy Spirit tempering his desires, and regulating his actions. And how poor and contemptible are earthly motives of obedience to him, who has a prospect opened to him beyond the narrow confines of this life, who

is taught to look forward to another and far better country, that is, an heavenly ; to an inheritance which nothing can impair, and to a kingdom which passeth not away !

SERMON V.

MATT. v. 43, 44, 45, 48.

Ye have heard that it has been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy: but I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.

Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.

WHAT is the just foundation of moral virtue, is a question which has been frequently asked, and which the welfare and improvement of mankind are deeply concerned in having correctly answered. For before we can ensure their obedience to the rules of morality, it is necessary to shew them upon what authority those rules are proposed

proposed to them, and upon what grounds their obedience is exacted. This has been, therefore, a most frequent topic of philosophical investigation in every age, from the time when men, in the progress of civilization, began to pursue abstract disquisitions, down to the present ; and it should by no means occasion our surprise, when we consider the diversities of the human character, if men, in reasoning upon this most interesting subject, have been led to very different conclusions.

But notwithstanding every thing which has been advanced of a different tendency, Christian philosophers at this day seem to be convinced, that the only true foundation of moral obligation is the will of God. No other foundation can man lay, which shall be able to secure the permanence of the superstructure. We have seen already that the origin of religious knowledge is of necessity to be ascribed to the immediate revelation of God ; and to what other source can we so well and so satisfactorily trace up, not merely the sanctions, but the first existence of moral regulations, which are so closely and necessarily interwoven with the idea of a
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Supreme Creator. All instruction delivered to man in his present state must necessarily be of a practical nature, and calculated to influence and direct his moral conduct. The first revelation, which the Almighty made of himself to his creatures, was attended with a precise and positive moral precept; and in proportion as he vouchsafed further communications of himself to them, he instructed them more fully in the nature of the obedience which he expected from them, according as the exigencies of their situation seemed to require, or the improvement of their faculties could bear such instruction.

Men may talk as much as they please of the beauty of virtue, of its conformity to the fitness of things, to reason, to nature, to truth, or its tendency to promote the public and individual good: all this is well; but it is not enough to establish a sufficient foundation of moral obedience, nor to account satisfactorily for the origin of moral regulations. We have reason to believe that rules of conduct existed long before men were sufficiently advanced in intellectual improvement, to be able to discern that beauty, that conformity, and that beneficial tendency, of
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which we have been speaking: they must therefore have been delivered from some superior power.

Allowing the first principles of morality to have originated in a divine revelation, (and we contend for nothing else,) it was easy enough for men, as their faculties improved, and the forms of life were multiplied, to modify and extend the principles thus handed down to them, to apply them to the infinite variety of new cases continually occurring, and to prove their excellence and utility by abstract arguments, or by a reference to general experience. But be it always remembered, that there is a great deal of difference between proving the justness of any particular position by reasoning, and being able by the same mode of reasoning to have discovered it originally.

The heathen philosophers, who were “without God in the world,” i. e. who were ignorant of the only true God, could only recommend the practice of virtue by elegant descriptions of its intrinsic excellence, or elaborate arguments in proof of its general usefulness. It is true, they sometimes spake of virtuous actions as being pleasing to the gods :

gods : but this was but little insisted on as a constraining principle of moral obedience ; and thus not having that argument which a long experience of human nature has shewn to be the only effectual one in awakening the feelings, and governing the actions, of the great bulk of mankind, it is not to be wondered at if their moral discourses were of little effect in ameliorating the manners of men in general ; or if the utmost degree of moral turpitude, and the almost universal prevalence of the most abominable excesses are recorded of nations, which have produced the most beautiful descriptions of virtue, and some of the strongest incitements to the practice of it, founded upon the temporal interests of mankind.

In the late convulsions of Europe, which have shaken the moral and political world to its very centre, many have been the attempts made by the modern philosophers to destroy the credibility, by setting aside the necessity, of revelation. One of the most favourite means, to which they have resorted, has been to set forth elaborate descriptions and minute specifications of human duty, without any sort of reference to religion :

the purest of their systems contain little else than the Gospel precepts, divested of the Gospel sanctions. These were attempts to separate religion from morality; and the attempts regularly failed, because these are two things which the Almighty has willed shall not by man be put asunder. The Catechism of Volney, for instance, contains as excellent a system of morals as ever was presented to the world. We need not say from whence the best parts of it have been borrowed: but what sanctions to moral precept are here given, what rewards and punishments are announced as the means of quickening the hopes, and alarming the fears of men? Why, truly, none but of a merely temporal kind, and such too as can have but little to do in influencing the conduct of the great mass of mankind, to whose feelings and comprehensions every moral system, to be good for any thing, must necessarily be accommodated.

It is therefore much to be regretted, that many excellent men, whose attachment to Christianity it were heresy to suspect, have employed so much of their talents and erudition in displaying the inferior reasons of moral obligation, without noticing, as was proper,

proper, the positive will of God, as the only real and generally effective one. When this principle is primarily adopted, and continually referred to as the proper ground of every moral system, it is delightful to observe the constant harmony and correspondence between the commandments of God, and the truest interests of man: that our Creator requires nothing of us, which tends not to promote our truest happiness, and is not sanctioned by the purest and most uncorrupted feelings of our nature. But for want of connecting all their reasonings on ethical subjects with this, as a leading and fundamental position, it is to be feared that these writers, without intending it, have given some aid to the opinion, that human duty is determinable by human reasonings, and human feelings: a position full as dangerous to the interests of true piety, as that the being and attributes of God were primarily discoverable by man's unassisted reason.

Religious knowledge is closely and directly connected with moral obligation; and the ideas of a supreme Creator and Governor of the world lead in regular consequence

to the necessity of men's conciliating the favour of so powerful a Being, by adopting such habits and rules of conduct, as shall be most pleasing and acceptable to him. The influence of religion upon man's moral character has at all times been striking and determinate : we have seen already how close and invariable an union has always subsisted between errors in religious belief and corruptions in moral practice ; and the justice of the claims of the Gospel to divine origin is in no small degree evinced by the purity and excellence of its moral precepts. And indeed it is not easy for us, according to our notions of the Almighty, to conceive that he should make a revelation of his existence and nature to man, without declaring to him some part, at least, of his will concerning him. That he did the former of these we have seen before : we have the account from the earliest and most authentic history of the human species ; and that account is abundantly confirmed by considerations of the utter incapacity of man, at his first creation, to have acquired any knowledge of the means of his subsistence, much less of the nature of his Creator : and from
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the same source of information we learn, that the knowledge of man's duties was of divine origin, and that they are divinely sanctioned. All the dealings of God with mankind have an evident reference to the direction and improvement of their moral conduct : and he has at all times, and in all places, with most adorable wisdom and goodness, proportioned the nature and the extent of his requisitions to the character and faculties of his creatures at each respective period.

Human nature in regard to its essential character has continued precisely the same throughout all ages, from the creation of Adam to the present day. The only difference consists in the progressive improvement which it has undergone through the gradual operation of several successive systems of divine revelation. The father of the human race differed not in this respect from his later descendants. We see in him precisely the same character which a general survey of mankind presents to us at this time ; a being given to know the nature of his dependence upon his Creator, the will of that Creator respecting his moral conduct.

duct, and his own obligations to obey that will ; beset with a variety of temptations to transgression, arising out of his very constitution, and engaged in a perpetual struggle between the obligations of duty, and the solicitations of passion. The difference consists only in the more accurate knowledge of his dependent condition, which he enjoys at present, in the greater sacrifices of sensual inclination, which he is required to make, and the more exalted motives to moral obedience with which he is now furnished. The object of the several divine dispensations was rather, we presume, to improve gradually than radically to alter the moral and intellectual condition of mankind.

It were absurd therefore to imagine that, human nature being always fundamentally the same, any new foundations of morality should be laid, or that the obligations to religious and moral obedience, arising out of the love and the fear of God, should ever be changed. Accordingly we observe that the morality in the several successive dispensations of God is at all times the same in regard to the great and primary principles of
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moral obligation : but that a very striking difference is observable in regard to the application and extension of those principles, and the various subdivisions of human duty resulting from them. That men should love God for his goodness so plentifully shed abroad through every part of the creation, that they should reverence him on account of his wisdom and power, has always been required of them as the firmest and most just grounds of their obedience to his laws. The union of these two principles constitutes at this day the most powerful motives to virtuous action to the sincere and enlightened Christian, as it did to men under the Patriarchal and Mosaic dispensations.

But under each of these dispensations, men are not informed precisely in the same way what modes of conduct shall serve as the best expressions of their thankfulness for the goodness of God, or their reverential apprehensions of his wisdom and power. They must necessarily be varied in proportion as their minds become gradually strengthened, as they become more fully acquainted with these most prominent attributes

tributes of the divine nature, as they were taught more worthily to appreciate the objects of their present existence, and the end for which they were sent into the world. We should err most egregiously, were we to expect of the child that degree of exalted and spiritual attachment to his superiors and benefactors which we have a right to expect from the full-grown man ; were we to demand of the one those denials of habit and inclination which may not unreasonably be demanded of the other : but in both cases regard and reverence are undoubtedly due, and may in both be exhibited, though not precisely in the same measure. Apply this to the condition and character of mankind under the different economies of divine revelation. God at all times proposed himself to mankind as the object of their warmest love, and their most awful reverence ; but it would have been unreasonable in him to require the same testimonies of love and reverence from men in the earlier ages of the world, when their ideas of his perfections were yet faint and imperfect, that he does at present, when their minds have been enlightened

enlightened by that magnificent display which he has made of himself in the Gospel of his Son Jesus Christ.

The business of man's present existence is to prepare for another and more perfect form of life after death ; to acquire such habits of holiness and virtue as are indispensably necessary, not only to his being worthy of entering into the kingdom of heaven, but also capable of relishing the nature of that happiness, which is there provided for the faithful children of men. To the furtherance of this benevolent design, all the proceedings of God with his creatures have been uniformly made subservient. It is unnecessary to repeat, that he willed the execution of this design to be gradual, that it should be perfected by no violent and hasty methods, by no alterations of the order of things, which he had previously established ; but by progressive advances, and by the operation of causes nicely adapted to produce the degree of improvement required.

As therefore a more full and complete revelation of religious knowledge to mankind accompanied their progress in intellectual strength;

strength ; so the code of morality enjoined to them was rendered more pure and definite. A variety of causes had contributed to bring the human intellect into a sufficient state of maturity to receive the sublime doctrines and holy precepts of Christianity, which, if proposed to them at any earlier period, would have been evidently disproportioned to their faculties : these would have been things much too high for their comprehension ; and the one would have been rejected as incredible, and the other as impossible, or unwise. But the progress of civilization, the gradual discovery and the successive improvement of the various arts by which life is comforted and adorned, the cultivation of abstract science, the accumulation of literature in the greater monarchies, and its diffusion at their fall—all these things had contributed to advance the intellectual character of man, to exercise and improve the reasoning faculties, to extend his views beyond present objects, and thus to prepare him for the reception and digestion of the strong meat of the Gospel, a system as necessary for his intellectual manhood, as the

Patriarchal

Patriarchal and Jewish systems had been, when as yet he had hardly grown up out of the infancy of his understanding.

And as the duties imposed on mankind under the Gospel were of a higher and severer nature, as they enjoined a more active and uniform obedience, a more peremptory control of fleshly passions and appetites, and a greater alienation of the affections from sensible objects, than any that were prescribed to them under previous dispensations; so were the sanctions of this new moral code of a different and superior kind, and the rewards and punishments held out to encourage the obedient, and to terrify the disobedient, proportioned to the feelings of mankind in a state of greater intellectual improvement.

A very elegant writer, who, to the disgrace of his genius and abilities, has been among the foremost of the modern assailants of Christianity, makes it a complaint, that any sort of reward should be proposed to excite men to the practice of virtue. He maintains that the native and intrinsic excellence of virtue is sufficient of itself to satisfy every one who shall be so fortunate as
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to attain unto her ; and that we derogate from that excellence, when we would offer a dowry with her, to render her more acceptable to mankind. But this sublime degree of disinterestedness, whatever attractions it might have for a few visionary philosophers, is not by any means adapted to the feelings of the great body of mankind. To influence their conduct in any remarkable degree, it is necessary that they be excited by the hope of reward to that which is required of them, and deterred by the fear of punishment from doing that which is forbidden them. The great Teacher of morality to mankind has proceeded upon a very different principle : he, knowing what was in man, has accommodated the sanctions of his moral precepts to the condition of man. He has not thought proper, because he well knew it was to no purpose, to recommend the pure and excellent morality which he taught, by abstract and desultory declamations on the beauty of virtue, and the conformity of good actions to the eternal fitness of things ; but has applied himself in a manner the most awful and impressive to the hopes and fears of frail and mortal men : the encouragements

couragements to virtue, and dissuaves from vice, which he has proposed, are of a nature sufficiently intelligible to all ranks and conditions of mankind, from the enlightened philosopher to the illiterate peasant; and thus are the wisdom and the justice of God magnified, who has in the Gospel set before men incitements to the practice of their duty sufficient to animate the energies of every one, and has left no room for the palliation and excuse of wilful transgression.

But to return:—the sanctions, by which the duties of Christianity are recommended, are as much superior to the sanctions of the Mosaic and Patriarchal schemes, as the precepts which it enjoins are of a higher and less earthly kind; and both the precepts themselves, and their sanctions, require a greater measure of intellectual advancement to render them intelligible and effective. It has been justly considered as a most important point gained in the institution of children, when we shall have once made the future to predominate over the present in their minds, when they shall have been once disposed willingly to resign an immediate gratification, for the sake of one which is
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more distant and less certain : no matter how much superior this expected gratification might be to the one which immediately solicits their enjoyment : this weakens not the argument at all : it rather shews the dawn of reason in infantine minds ; that they begin to calculate and compare, and are able for the first time to determine their conduct according to the prospect of the greater good, however strong the temptation might be, which is presented by the opportunity of immediate gratification. When they are grown up into manhood, the task is unspeakably more easy : so much of human life is spent in present self-denial for the sake of future enjoyment, that it is no difficult matter to engage them then to submit to the one, for the sake of being afterwards recompensed with the other : nay, it is what they often and readily do of their own accord ; and it is not unfrequently found, that, whilst their expectations are confined to mere earthly blessings, their real enjoyment is greater whilst they are engaged in the expectation, than when their wishes are crowned with success.

Now the condition of men at the date of
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the date of the Patriarchal and Mosaic revelations may be considered as bearing the same analogy to their condition at the coming of Christ, that the state of childhood does to that of adult years; and therefore we observe that the motives to religious obedience offered to men in the former case were different from those in the latter; but still exactly proportioned to the feelings and character of mankind at either period. The ancient people of God, being as yet but mere children in understanding, were to be worked upon by mere temporal motives, and the promise of immediate protection and advantage; and this they sometimes appear to have claimed from the Almighty, as a stipulated condition, upon which their acknowledgment of him, and their obedience to his laws, should be continued. “ If God, says Jacob, “ will be with me, and will keep “ me in the way that I go, and will give me “ bread to eat, and raiment to put on, so “ that I come again to my father’s house in “ peace, then shall the Lord be my God :” q. d. if he will preserve and prosper me in my temporal undertakings, then will I obey him, and keep his statutes and command-

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ments. And it appears not to have been till after many such instances of divine favour and protection vouchsafed to him, that he set himself in good earnest to reform the religion of his family, and to put an authoritative stop to the idolatrous impurities which had hitherto made a part of their daily practice. “ Put away the strange gods
“ that are among you, and be clean, and
“ change your garments, and let us arise and
“ go up to Bethel : and I will make there
“ an altar unto God, who answered me in
“ the day of my distress, and was with me
“ in the way which I went.”

The religious character of mankind, even the most civilized and enlightened, in the Patriarchal times, may hence be easily determined : and in this manner did Almighty wisdom judge it expedient to deal with them ; to fall in, for a time at least, with their narrow views and carnal apprehensions ; to engage them in his service by the promise of immediate and temporal rewards ; till at length they should become capable of understanding, and estimating as they ought, those higher hopes and better promises, which were afterwards held out to them as
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the means of exciting their attention, and animating their obedience.

In succeeding periods of the history of God's dealings with his chosen people, we find them not yet sufficiently strengthened and enlightened to obey his laws, without the sanction of temporal rewards and punishments. Earthly blessings, health and riches, peace at home, or victory abroad, were the most animating encouragements to moral obedience which could affect the gross conceptions and narrow views of the Israelites; and it was therefore by means of these that they were retained in the service of God, and kept from the fascinating pollutions of idolatry; and earthly evils, famine and pestilence, defeat and captivity, were, by that equal providence under which they were governed, the uniform punishment of their neglect or their transgression of the commandments of their Almighty Creator and King.

But Christianity addresses itself to the human race, as being no longer children in understanding, but men; whom it is not necessary to influence by immediate and temporal motives, but who are old enough, as it

were, to abstract themselves from the things about them, and to look forward by faith to things as yet unseen. The certain evidence of a life to come, the awful prospect of a future judgment, and an eternity of happiness or misery as the recompense of men's earthly conduct, according as they have done good or evil in this life; these are the motives, by which the obedience of the disciple of Christ to the moral prescriptions of his heavenly master is best to be secured. A greater abundance of the real comforts of the world, though well enough compatible with the profession of Christianity, and certainly as much if not more attainable under the discipline of the Gospel, than any other form of religious practice, are yet by no means annexed as necessary consequences to the most careful and conscientious discharge of Christian duty: the Christian is commanded to set an inferior value upon these things, and even willingly and cheerfully to resign them, whensoever it should so happen that they cannot be retained consistently with the nature of his profession: and he is comforted under every deprivation of this kind that can befall him,

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under the very heaviest and severest afflictions with which human life can be visited, by the promise of a great and eternal recompense in heaven ; when amid the profusion of blissful enjoyment, which shall then be his portion, all the misery and all the happiness even of this life shall be remembered no more.

Such different motives were resorted to by the Almighty Creator at different periods, to secure the obedience of his creatures to the laws which he gave them ; and thus clearly is marked their gradual advancement from the infancy to the manhood of intellectual growth.

But it is proper to say something of the different degrees of moral strictness observable in the laws themselves, which the Almighty enjoined to his creatures under different dispensations. We remarked, a short time since, that the fundamental principles of morality in every divine dispensation are precisely the same ; that there neither is, nor can be, consistently with the divine perfections, any real difference between them ; but that the only difference discoverable is in the further conclusions

drawn from them, and their more minute application under the Gospel of Christ, than under preceding dispensations.

It is a favourite opinion with some writers, that there is no one precept which has been generally considered as peculiar to Christianity, the principle of which is not to be found in the Decalogue ; and, to prove this, they maintain, that in each of the prohibitions contained in that code, not only the crime there precisely and specifically mentioned is forbidden, but every act and every feeling, which can tend, however remotely, to the commission of that crime. In this sense it may most truly be said, that the principles of morality in either system are precisely the same, and that they are agreed in the minuter subdivisions of human duty. But before the Gospel was added as a commentary to the Decalogue, I much question whether this extensive application of its precepts was generally adopted. It is more probable that the Jews received and regarded them in their plain and literal sense, without extending their prohibitory operation to other less open and glaring violations of moral rectitude. The forgiveness of injuries,
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for instance, and the injunction not to render evil for evil, may be supposed to be contained in the sixth commandment ; because a vindictive disposition, if allowed and cherished, has a manifest tendency to produce the crime of murder ; and therefore we cannot more safely secure ourselves from committing the greater crime, than by carefully abstaining from the lesser, which is too often the parent of the other. But this was a greater degree of refinement than could reasonably be expected of the Jewish nation ; and any individual might conceive himself blameless, though he cherished sentiments of hatred against his offender, provided he suffered not those sentiments to flame out in any violent attack upon his comforts or his existence.

The most beautiful and engaging feature in the morality of the Gospel, is that spirit of love and benevolence which pervades every part of it : “ Behold, a new commandment,” says Christ to his disciples, “ I give unto you, that ye love one another.” By the epithet “ new,” prefixed to the commandment of loving one another, it is not to be supposed that our Lord is prescribing a duty unknown to mankind, and never en-

joined before, so much as giving to a former commandment a new and more extensive application. For the duty of benevolence is certainly not left out of the Mosaic code, and makes a frequent subject of prophetic exhortation. To relieve the distressed, and to comfort the afflicted, which are the most amiable offices of humanity, are often interestingly described, and powerfully recommended, in the Old Testament. It was a portion of the true spirit of benevolence which dictated the ordinance, that the man, who had left a sheaf of corn in the field inadvertently, should not return to fetch it, but that it should be the property of the poor gleaner. Many also of the Jewish celebrations are either connected with, or were expressly intended to serve the purposes of benevolence. Thus, among the partakers of the feast of tabernacles, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, are particularly enumerated. The Sabbatical year also, and the institution of the Jubilee, are evident proofs of the existence of a benevolent spirit in the laws of Moses.

But, agreeably to what was advanced before, a duty the same in principle is enjoined by the teacher of a more perfect form of ethics,

ethics, but in a new and more interesting form; free from the selfish limitations under which it was to be exercised by the Jews, and extended to a greater variety of objects. The good offices and kind feelings of the Jew were confined to those of his own nation; toward all beside he was allowed to entertain sentiments of contempt and hatred; and this perhaps with a political view, to preserve the chosen depositaries of true religion more free from Gentile contamination. But the Christian is forbidden to circumscribe his love to his fellow-creatures by any such narrow considerations: he is commanded to extend the disposition and feelings of charity to all mankind, to strangers, yea even to enemies. Hear the divine Teacher himself; “Ye have heard that it has been
 “said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and
 “hate thine enemy: but I say unto you,
 “Love your enemies, bless them that curse
 “you, do good to them that hate you, and
 “pray for them that despitefully use you
 “and persecute you; that ye may be the
 “children of your Father which is in hea-
 “ven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the
 “evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on
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“ the just and on the unjust. Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.” The duty of chastity was also another instance of this kind: that such a duty was enjoined, both under the Patriarchal and Jewish dispensations, is evident to every one who considers the very heavy penalties denounced against adultery, the high degree of disreputableness attached to the profession of a harlot, and the practice of fornication, independent of the criminality of idolatrous celebrations, which were not unfrequently connected with these impurities. But the observance of the duty of chastity was conceived to be very compatible with polygamy, and even concubinage in the one dispensation; and with the frequency of divorce, for slight and trivial reasons, permitted to the Jews on account of the hardness of their hearts, in the other.

But, when adopted into the Gospel of Christ, this duty, like every other, receives an additional degree of purity and precision. The penalties against adultery are continued unrepealed, and very heavy woes are pronounced against every sort of impurity, not only in deed, but in thought also: a fresh
restraint

restraint is laid upon the wanton caprice of carnal appetite, by the prohibition of divorce, for the same reasons that it had been tolerated by the law of Moses; and the bonds of matrimonial union are drawn still closer by the awful declaration, that whosoever shall put away his wife, except for a crime which must necessarily poison the fountain of connubial happiness, is himself guilty of that crime.

It were easy to produce a variety of other instances; but these are sufficient to prove the truth of our leading position, viz. that the morality of every divine revelation is in principle exactly the same; but that the Christian system, as being addressed to mankind at a later and more improved period of their intellectual character, has proportionally improved upon the morality of Moses and the Patriarchs, and extended the original principles to a greater variety of objects, and enforced the observance of them under an increased number of forms, by fresh motives and more powerful sanctions.

It were devoutly to be wished, that these considerations, as often as they occur, could have their due weight upon our minds, and
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enable us to walk more worthy of the high vocation whereunto we are called. We are in the condition of those to whom much has been given, and of whom therefore much will be required. We are called upon to make greater sacrifices of earthly feeling, to practise a greater mortification of fleshly appetites, and to burn with a warmer degree of zeal in the service of God, than was required of his ancient people : but let us recollect too, that our powers, and faculties, and opportunities, are much greater and more numerous than theirs ; that we have a greater degree of religious knowledge imparted to us, which necessarily brings with it a more awful responsibility ; we have clearer views opened to us of a future state of existence ; and, above all, we have a most powerful motive, which they could not have had, to the love of God, which is the only source of real obedience to his laws, in that he so loved us, that he sent his only-begotten Son into the world to be the propitiation for our sins. How then shall we escape, if we neglect the means of so great a salvation ! The times of ignorance, at which God winked, are past, and he now calleth upon

upon all men every where to repent. Let us hear and obey the call—let us be stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as we well know that our labour in him will not be in vain.

SERMON VI.

EXODUS xiv. 31.

And all Israel saw that great work which the Lord did upon the Egyptians ; and the people feared the Lord, and believed the Lord and his servant Moses.

ONE of the most useful and interesting applications of the invention of letters, has been to record the history of man ; and that natural curiosity, which we have to know the fates and fortunes of our species in past ages, becomes, under due regulations, a most effective instrument of our intellectual and moral improvement. But the bare knowledge of facts, however it may serve to amuse the childish and unreflecting, will hardly be sufficient to satisfy the studious and inquisitive mind. The advantage of studying history consists in the information which is there liberally afforded, of the proper

per tendency of human actions ; and the additional motives which are thus presented to us, from the examples of our predecessors to follow good, and to abstain from evil.

But to obtain this advantage in its complete degree, and to preserve us from a variety of errors in judging of the conduct of men, which we should otherwise be sure to run into, it is necessary that we extend our enquiries much farther, that we acquaint ourselves not merely with the actions of men, nor yet only with the motives which naturally produced them, but also with the peculiar character of the human species at that time, and in that place ; the progress of religious knowledge and civilization among them ; the peculiar circumstances and opportunities of the individual actors themselves. Without doing this, our views of human conduct at different periods will of necessity be crude and imperfect ; the principles which we establish will be unsound, and our reasonings deduced from them will consequently be of little value. We shall pronounce too hastily and rashly upon men's moral merits and demerits, if we neglect to take into the account, as far as may be done,

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the many circumstances, which, if justly estimated, would tend, in a greater or less degree, to detract from the one, and to soften and palliate the other. Above all, we might be apt to conclude of some degrees of moral merit recorded in ancient history, that they are too high and difficult for us to attain ; and, what is worse, we shall be too easily led to excuse defects and errors in ourselves, from the examples of mankind in the earlier ages of the world, unless we bear it steadily in mind, that, as we have at least the same helps and advantages which they had, it will not be pardonable in us, if we come behind them in any good thing : and that if it can be proved, which we presume may satisfactorily be done, that we are superior to them in the former respect, so a proportionate degree of superiority is required of us in the latter.

These reflections were excited by a consideration of that remarkable interference of Divine Providence, to which the words of the text refer. We read, that, after one of the most astonishing displays of divine power that was ever made to mankind, and by which the Israelites were preserved from

immediate and total destruction, whilst their enemies were swallowed up before their eyes ; when Israel saw this great work which the Lord wrought, then they “ feared the “ Lord, and believed the Lord, and his servant Moses.” Was it necessary, we should be tempted to ask, to record with such peculiar minuteness, as a circumstance which could otherwise be supplied from a general view of the subject of the history, what our feelings would represent as a mere matter of course, or at least as a thing so little remarkable, as hardly to have deserved to be specifically mentioned ? What, we might be tempted to cry out, were the many miracles, which were wrought previous to their departure from Egypt, each of which we should conceive sufficient to animate the faith, and secure the obedience, of the most sceptical of mankind—were these insufficient to produce any such effect upon the Jewish nation, who were witnesses of their working, and in whose favour they were wrought ? And when we read further in their history, and find that the conviction which was produced by such incontrovertible evidence was too weak to endure the trial of even
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the commonest inconveniences of life; that, when pressed with hunger and thirst, they murmured against their Almighty Protector, as if he, who had so miraculously rescued them from the grasp of the Egyptians, was unable or unwilling to supply them with the means of subsistence—when we observe them thus fickle and inconsistent, we are at a loss what to think of this very singular people, whose conduct appears to us as being at utter variance with the common and acknowledged course of all human feelings. And this very circumstance has been to the unbelievers of modern times a ground of plausible objection to the truth of the miraculous events narrated in the Mosaic history. For, some of them contend, if such miracles actually took place, it is impossible but that their effects upon the minds and manners of those who witnessed them would have been more deep and permanent: the subsequent perverseness and disobedience of the Jews, after the Almighty had made his power known to them in so intelligible and wonderful a manner, is, according to them, a miracle in morals, as great as any of the

recorded physical ones, and by their contrary action they destroy one another.

Another class of objectors, reasoning in a different way from the same premises, are pleased to consider the whole Jewish dispensation as derogating from the goodness and impartiality of God, and therefore utterly unworthy of credit. They are unable to reconcile with the divine perfections, the selection of one particular people as the objects of divine favour, nor the continuance of that favour to them, after they had shewn themselves so entirely undeserving of it; whose hearts were too hard to yield to the most affectionate calls, and their feelings too fullen to be animated into regular obedience by the most tremendous displays of Omnipotence.

But by adverting to the principle upon which we have hitherto proceeded, we shall be able to obviate every objection of this sort, and to adjust every apparent irregularity in the dealings of the Almighty with his creatures. We must be cautious of supposing that the people of the Jews possessed the same degree of intellectual strength, the
same

same tenacity of thought, the same power of abstraction from present objects, which are the property of some men in these more enlightened days. We must always remember that the benevolent purposes of God for the improvement of man were destined to operate by slow and hardly perceptible degrees ; that the selection of the children of Abraham, as the only depositaries of true religion for a time, was an essential part of such a design, as we have seen already ; and that it was not on their account, or from any arbitrary partiality towards them, that they were chosen, but with views of much more extensive benevolence, as is evident from their being deprived of that exclusive share of divine communication, when they had fulfilled the purpose for which they had been originally selected. The Jews, like the rest of mankind at that early period, were children in understanding ; and therefore the Almighty graciously condescended to deal with them as with children, accommodating his instructions to their comprehension, using such proofs, and such encouragements, as applied most directly to their outward

senses,

fenfes, and bearing with their continued frowardnefs and perversenefs.

The order of our enquiries leads us now to confider the different degrees of evidence, upon which the Almighty willed that the faith of his Church fhould in different ages be founded. The proofs of divine interference in the instruction and direction of mankind may be confidered in three feveral points of view : 1. Senfible appearances of the Almighty, and his heavenly minifters ; 2. Miracles ; and, 3. The completion of prophecy.

1. Senfible appearances of the Almighty and his heavenly minifters. This was a mode of evidence peculiarly well adapted to the earlier ages of the world, and beft fited to the infantine imbecility of the human intellect. From the creation of the world to the miffion of Mofes, we read of very frequent appearances of the Deity, and communications of his will to man : but we meet with very few miracles, ftrictly fo called, if we except the tranflation of Enoch, the deluge, and the birth of Ifaac. And the reason of this feems to have been, that it
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was necessary for mankind to have had experience of the regular operation of the established laws of nature, for a considerable space of time, before a miracle could be received as a decisive proof of a supernatural interposition to alter that regular operation. If, for example, the waters of the sea had been divided, or the sun and moon stayed in their course, within a short period after the creation, these events perhaps would have hardly been considered as miraculous, but have been attributed to some particular law of nature operating at certain times and under certain circumstances : and the same might have been supposed of similar events, whenever they occurred in future. It seems necessary therefore, in order to give miracles their full force, that a period of some continuance should elapse from the creation, before they could be introduced as sufficient proofs of divine interposition. The want of this species of evidence was amply supplied by the frequent sensible communications of God in his own person, or by the ministry of angels, and by his evidently conducting the Patriarchs in all their changes of situation. But this evidence varied both in the

degree of its plainness, and of the frequency with which it was vouchsafed, according as the circumstances and the faculties of men were altered or improved ; and after a time it was entirely taken away, when they were sufficiently exercised to be able to receive and comprehend other evidences of the existence and the power of the Most High.

When the Almighty, at the first formation of man, placed him in Paradise, surrounded with every thing requisite for his subsistence and comfort, it was necessary that he should exhibit himself personally to his creatures, in order to bring them to the knowledge of him. Without such a condescension on the part of his Maker, Adam must have continued in ignorance of this important truth, the first principle and foundation of all moral and intellectual improvement. For however loudly the goodly frame of the universe, and the beauty, and order, and harmonious adaptation of its several parts, might proclaim the existence of a most wise, and mighty, and benevolent first cause, to the studious and reflecting mind of the philosopher in after ages ; yet their voices would have been lost upon our first parent, their
words

words to him would have been hardly intelligible. Therefore another mode of proof, better adapted to the condition of the father of the human race, was presented to him by his all-benevolent Instructor. From the very concise accounts which are preserved of this most interesting period of human existence, we are yet enabled to collect with sufficient certainty, that the Creator designed to hold a very frequent and familiar intercourse with his creatures; that he manifested himself to them personally, and conversed with them; and thus were they convinced that “he was,” by means the most certain and unequivocal, by direct appeals to their outward senses. In what manner, or under what particular form, he displayed himself to them, we are not explicitly told, neither does it at all concern us to enquire: it was sufficient for the purposes intended by those parental communications, that they were enabled to know when their Creator was personally with them, and to distinguish his voice when he deigned to hold converse with them. And this is evident from the prohibitive injunction laid upon them when they were placed in the garden of Eden; and

and also from the readiness with which Adam distinguished the voice of God, after his own dreadful lapse from innocence; a voice which had before conveyed to him instruction and consolation; but which he now dreaded, through fear of the awful sentence which it was about to pronounce upon him.

As we read further, we find that similar communications were made to Cain also, and that the Almighty both appeared to him, and talked with him before and after the murder of Abel; in the former case to remonstrate with him on the commencement of his enmity to his more righteous brother, and in the latter to denounce the punishment due to the crime of which he had been guilty. And when he complains of the punishment as being greater than he could bear, he makes one part of it particularly the subject of regret and despair, that he should be hid from the face of the Lord, and be no longer admitted to enjoy his personal presence and communication: so that at that very early period man had begun to estimate the value of being thus distinguished by an intercourse with his Maker, however
insufficient

insufficient it had been in the case of Cain, to restrain him from imbruing his hands in the blood of his brother.

The superior righteousness and piety of Enoch appear to have been rewarded by a much greater portion of divine favour, and a more close and intimate connection with his Maker: and by this means, as being the chosen depositary of divine truth, he was eminently well qualified to become a preacher of righteousness to his brethren, and to convey the knowledge of God to others less favoured in this respect than himself. For when mankind began to increase, it does not appear that the divine appearance was exhibited to them universally, but confined to a few individuals, whose age, or station, or acknowledged sanctity of life, had made them objects of general regard and reverence: and this, no doubt, was to many a very prevailing motive to a general and uniform obedience to the commandments of God, that they might humbly aspire to the same marks of heavenly distinction that were conferred upon their teachers. And this method of dispensation answered the benevolent purpose of the Almighty, as well as if he had
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made a particular and personal communication of himself to every separate individual; for the time was not yet, when human depravity branching into new forms, according to the increased strength of the human intellect, began to take advantage of the hopes and fears of mankind, and to boast of fancied revelations from the Most High, when men became wicked and subtle enough to pretend a divine commission for the furtherance of their own interested and ambitious views.

Continuing the order of the Mosaic history—when it pleased the Almighty to separate the Patriarch Abraham by an especial call from the rest of the world, the same means of confirming his faith, and awakening his hopes, were applied by divine wisdom. The character of Abraham, when fully and justly considered, may perhaps be found one of the most perfect of any which are pourtrayed by the hand of Moses. We read of no stubborn resistance to the will of his heavenly leader, no sullen and reluctant compliance with his commands, nor any desponding and incredulous murmurings against his appointments. We discover in him none of that absurd vanity, no signs of
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that contemptuous spirit towards his neighbours apparently forsaken of God, which we are told is not unusually characteristic of those who conceive themselves admitted to extraordinary participations of divine favour : far less do we observe in him any traces of a disposition to take the vengeance of God into his own hands, and to scatter havoc and destruction among the nations, who either did not worship God in his way, or refused to acknowledge the God whom he worshipped. On the contrary, we find him yielding a most ready and humble submission to the injunctions of his heavenly Sovereign, even at the expence of the dearest and most powerful affections of human nature. We behold him interceding with God (with a degree of what the present feelings of men might term presumptuous boldness) for the preservation of a people, no wise connected with him, except by the common tie of humanity, and whose shocking enormities and universal depravity had cried aloud for their destruction, to the Supreme Governor of the universe.

And to what cause can we so well ascribe the superior amiableness and excellence of
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the character of Abraham, as to the circumstance we have mentioned before, the frequency of his communications with HIM who is the source of all holiness and benevolence? It is a common observation amongst men, that they become pure or impure, virtuous or wicked, according to the character of those with whom they are most frequently associated: and when we read that Abraham enjoyed the most frequent and familiar intercourse with the Parent of every good and benevolent feeling, how are we to wonder that his conduct was every thing which obedience to his heavenly Instructor could make it?

We have already observed, that all the changes of situation, which Abraham and his descendants underwent subsequent to the primary selection of that family, for purposes of universal benevolence, were appointed by the Almighty, and intended to keep them perpetually in mind of their dependence upon him: we are now to remark that all those changes were effected by some very sensible communication of the Deity with them; and their ready obedience can alone be referred to the striking and immediate

mediate operation of that powerful kind of evidence, which was then necessarily presented to the feelings and senses of men at that very early stage of their history.

Without particularizing any farther, we may observe, that immediate communications from the Deity were uniformly vouchsafed to mankind precisely in that measure and degree, that their peculiar circumstances at the time rendered expedient. They were therefore much more frequent and obvious in the very earliest ages of the human race, than they were afterwards, because, agreeably to our leading position, they were then more peculiarly requisite than in succeeding ages, when new evidences and arguments of faith were supplied to command the obedience of mankind. The Almighty appears to have withdrawn himself *personally* from mankind, in proportion as they were enabled by the progress of knowledge to estimate and accept of other proofs of his being and attributes. And this want of evidence was supplied by particular revelations made to individuals, and by miracles which he allowed them to work in his name, as often

as

as any great purpose worthy of such a supernatural interposition was to be executed.

We read but of two instances of divine interposition made generally to a collective body of mankind, in the subsequent course of the history of revelation ; and these were upon occasions which fully justified their being made : the first was on sanctioning the law of Moses from Mount Sinai, by a tremendous convulsion of the elements of nature ; and the other less tremendous, but equally authoritative, to sanction the mission of Christ by an audible and intelligible voice from heaven. Whoever considers the importance of Christianity to man's best interests, and the necessary subservience of the Mosaic dispensation to the introduction of Christianity, will not be surpris'd if such extraordinary circumstances attended the promulgation of either of them.

We conclude therefore, that the evidence, upon which the faith of the Church was founded in the very earliest ages of the human species, was “ an immediate interference of the Almighty, and an evident display of himself to the outward senses of
“ men.”

“men.” With our present notions and feelings, we conceive that such communications could not but have been effectual in influencing the moral conduct of mankind in a very remarkable manner: we affect to be astonished at their frequent backslidings and transgressions: we are fond of asserting, that with their advantages we should have conducted ourselves after a very different manner; we should have testified our acknowledgment of such marks of divine favour by the most correct and unceasing submission to the decrees and orders of Omnipotence. This objection has been answered already: but another class of objectors are ready to cry out, “If God be the
“supreme Governor of the world, and our
“belief in him is necessary to our well-being, why does he not vouchsafe to display
“himself to us in as sensible and intelligible
“a manner as he is said to have done to the
“fathers of the human race? Why are we
“left to collect from other and more remote
“quarters the evidences of his being and his
“attributes, which were proposed to them
“in a manner so little liable to be mis-
“taken?” How to obviate this objection,

we need only repeat what has been observed before, of the infancy and gradual growth to manhood of the human species. Whilst man, like the children of the present day, was only governed by his outward senses, it was proper that he should be convinced of the truth of things, which were of undeniable importance to him to know by outward and sensible proofs; but when he became sufficiently advanced to make any tolerable use of the powers of his understanding, it was undoubtedly an equal mark of divine favour, that such proofs should be presented to him as depended upon an exercise of his intellectual powers. To have continued the former proofs when he was of an age to feel and understand rightly the force of the latter, would have been to violate that law of order and uniformity, which the Almighty evidently proposed to himself in regard to the institution of the human species.

But shall it be said, that men at this day, with the innumerable advantages which they possess over their earlier predecessors, are destitute of sufficient evidence to persuade them of the being and attributes of God? Let us consider only how very different

ferent is our situation in point of intellectual improvement from theirs ; how much better able we are than they to examine evidence of different kinds, to pursue a long train of argument, and to detect truth in some of its most favourite and most secret lurking-places. To have required this of the ancient people of God, without prematurely forcing their intellectual powers, would have been to demand impossibilities: to require it of us in our present improved state, is nothing more than the uniformity of the government of God will be found to require : for as none of the commonest blessings of life are to be obtained without the exercise of some of our faculties, so neither faith in the existence and providence of God, the source and the ground of the greatest blessings, can with confidence be gratuitously presented. We dare not therefore assert, that the proofs of this first and most necessary truth are more difficult to us than they were to the earlier patriarchs, who were honoured by a direct and especial revelation from the Almighty himself. We can prove the truth of this fundamental doctrine, and we are contending for nothing farther, by

arguments which our first forefathers were unable to use themselves, and against which primitive ignorance rendered them invulnerable. Setting aside every other source of argument for the existence, and power, and wisdom, and goodness of God, the material creation lies open to our view : the progress of arts and sciences has brought us acquainted with many of the most remarkable though less obvious properties of matter ; we are enabled to see, with a degree of clearness not vouchsafed to men in the patriarchal times, the evident proofs of a first intelligent cause, in the regular formation of every sensible object, and its constant and strict subservience to one grand and benevolent design.

II. We are to consider the working of miracles as one of the means by which the faith of mankind at different periods of the church history was to be confirmed.

It is evident to every one how very different in this respect also the dispensations of God to mankind have been in different ages. To instance in the case of the last revelation of his will to them : what different proofs accompanied its first promulgation,
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from those upon which men are now required to believe in its divine origin ! When Christianity was first preached to mankind, signs and wonders and supernatural workings were the arguments which arrested their attention, and brought them to consider carefully, and in most cases to receive gladly, the sublime doctrines of the Gospel. This was a method of influencing the feelings and opinions of men, circumstanced as they were, the most direct and powerful of any which we can conceive. But at present, the most acute and intelligent enquirer has a longer and more circuitous path to tread, before he can arrive at that full and rational conviction, which in their case was instantaneously imparted. He has occasion for some degree of intellectual improvement, much good sense, a habit of steady investigation, and the frequent exercise of candour and humility. But this tedious process was saved by the exhibition of sensible miracles to those whom Christ and his Apostles addressed ; and some well-dispositioned men at this day, who are more than half inclined to become Christians, might lament the discontinuance of what would at once, perhaps,

diffipate all their doubts, and completely establish their belief.

The miracles, which were wrought in confirmation of the truth of Christianity at its first publication, are justly considered as forming its strongest claim to divine authority. Infidels are well enough aware of this, and amongst other means of discrediting the reality of those miracles, they urge their total non-appearance, not only at present, but for many ages past. Their argument, reduced to a logical form, is, “miracles are “not wrought now, therefore they never “were wrought ;” a proposition, says a late amiable Prelate, in which every reasonable man must be astonished how the premises and conclusion could ever be found to stand together.

But let us again resort to our general principle. Miracles were a necessary aliment to the faith of men in the childhood of the species ; they are necessary also to support the growth, during infancy, of any new dispensation from above. When they are no longer necessary, they are withheld, in order that the authority of those already wrought may be the more striking and solemn. For
God

God doeth nothing in vain, nothing superfluous : plenteously as his mercies are shed abroad through the creation, and abundantly as he seems to have supplied the means of animal existence and comfort ; yet were it given us to make so minute an investigation, we should find that in no case is there any real waste or profusion. With the same dignified œconomy have Almighty wisdom and goodness dispersed the means of religious belief, or of spiritual life and growth : these are varied indeed ; but they are varied in exact proportion to the character and circumstances of those to whom they are presented. A proper attention to the different circumstances, in which the Church has been placed at different periods, would convince us that such a proportion has at all times been most strictly preserved, and that we should err greatly and dangerously, were we to characterize the distributions of the Most High, in this respect, as too lavish at one time, or too sparing at another.

Whensoever it shall so happen, that the foundations upon which our faith is at present founded shall be demonstrated to be unfound ; whensoever the present evidence for

the truth of Christianity shall wear out, and be found insufficient to satisfy the enquiries of the virtuous and intelligent part of mankind; we may then venture to suppose, that the goodness of God will be concerned in supporting, by new helps, a system so worthy of himself, and so necessary to the best interests of his creatures: but till that period shall arrive, which at present appears to be placed at an unmeasurable and infinite distance, let us not complain that extraordinary manifestations are not vouchsafed to us, as often as with impertinent curiosity, or sullen incredulity, we shall dare to call for them.

It is needless to repeat, what has so often been advanced before, that, in communicating knowledge, the proofs and reasons should be of a kind commensurate with the character and faculties of the persons to whom that knowledge is to be communicated. It is thus that we deal with children. In all elementary treatises we give them reasons and illustrations suitable to their advancement in intellectual strength. But when we deal with men, these minute attentions are no longer necessary: we pass over many intermediate links in the chain of demonstration,

tion, because to the advanced scholar they easily and readily suggest themselves. The most illustrious philosopher of modern times, when he began to unfold the philosophical principles of nature, conceived himself to be addressing such as were grown up to be men in geometrical reasoning. He therefore shortened his demonstration, suppressed many subordinate helps which mere learners would have wanted, and took those things for granted which experienced geometers were, as he thought, sufficiently well qualified to demonstrate. He was complained of on this account, but very unfairly; he wrote to men, and not to children: he was not compiling an introductory system for the institution of youth; he claimed the attention of scholars, who had made themselves acquainted with the usual operations of nature, and the general process of mathematical induction; and he omitted nothing which they were not fully competent to supply by the careful exercise of their understanding.

The nature and attributes of God are never rendered more intelligible to us, than when he is represented to us in a relative point of view; when the connection in
which

which we stand with our Creator is illustrated and exemplified by similar connections, which subsist amongst mankind. Thus when in our daily prayers we are taught to address him as our Father, we are at once impressed with the idea of the authority which he has over us, on account of the being which he has given us, the continued protection which we receive from him, and our consequent obligations to love, to reverence, and to obey him. Upon the present occasion we are considering the Almighty as the teacher and instructor of mankind; and the wisdom of his applying to them in different manners at different periods of their intellectual improvement, is to our conceptions sufficiently vindicated, by the acknowledged propriety of a similar mode of proceeding in human instructors.

If we duly and impartially consider all the circumstances of the case, we shall be convinced, that the exhibition of sensible miracles to secure the faith of mankind at the first preaching of the Gospel, was incalculably more *necessary* than the continuance of them would be *useful* to us for the same purposes. And independent of the consideration,

deration, that every new revelation of God's will, at whatever period and to whatever people, must necessarily be accompanied by miracles; a teacher who professes to "come from God" must, for the credit of his pretensions, be able to do those things "which no man can do except God be with him."

But what were the circumstances under which the Gospel was first preached to mankind? Were they not such as not merely to justify, but imperiously to demand, the visible interference of Almighty power in "signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds?" Men were authoritatively called upon to acknowledge as their Saviour and Redeemer a man whose outward appearance and condition were every thing that could be unprepossessing; destitute of every advantage which birth, and authority, and wealth can bestow; the reputed son of a carpenter; the friend and companion of the poor and illiterate fishermen of Galilea; a man "despised and rejected" of his fellow men; who had not where to lay his head; and who closed a life of poverty and affliction by a painful and ignominious death upon the cross. Add to this, that he promised not to reward the
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obedience of his followers by the enjoyment of earthly pleasures, or riches, or dominion : his rewards were too distant, as well as too spiritual in their nature, to have successfully awakened the attention of any considerable portion of mankind. Yet further : the doctrines which he taught were such as could not but be unpalatable to human corruption : he demanded of his followers that they should restrain the gratification of sensual feelings within narrower limits than any religious lawgiver had thought proper to prescribe before ; that they should exhibit the uniform practice of self-denial, of humility, of forgiveness, and acquire habits of internal as well as external purity. Surely no one, who is at all acquainted with the human heart, can be ignorant how hard these things were to be learned, and what strong arguments were necessary to bring men to the practice of them. And lastly, the converts to Christianity had before them the certain prospect of encountering every worldly evil in consequence of their profession, the loss of friends, the malice of enemies, bonds and imprisonment, torture and death. Under all these circumstances, and such as by no means
exist

exist at present, how necessary was it that modes of conviction more striking and immediate should be applied to the earlier Christians than to us ; how indispensable at such a period were manifest interpositions of divine power, to secure men's attachment to a religion, which they had every temptation to abandon !

“ All this,” says the modern opponent of Christianity, “ is very well : but still why
 “ am I required to give my assent to a religion
 “ supposed to be promulgated many
 “ ages ago, and which rests upon the proof
 “ of miracles, to which I have never been a
 “ witness ? I have no faith in miracles,
 “ which are presented to me upon the testimony
 “ of others ; and with the knowledge
 “ I have already gained of the usual order of
 “ nature, I am disposed to consider every related
 “ miracle to be as improbable, as the
 “ testimony of man can render it probable.”

This reasoning does not seem to be correctly founded : there are many phænomena in physics, which at their first discovery stood on no other foundation ; and these, as being contrary to the then known laws of nature,
 partook

partook of the nature of miracles ; and yet to deny them would have been to deny the truth. But succeeding experience verified them, and proved their consistence with the common and acknowledged laws of nature. Yes—but at the time they were in a similar predicament with miracles ; they were apparent infractions upon the order of nature, just as miracles are : and the subsequent confirmation of them proved the unsoundness of that principle, upon which men refused their assent to things different from their usual experience, because they saw them not with their own eyes, notwithstanding the best and most respectable testimony to their truth.

It would lead us into too long a detail, were we to particularize upon this head : a very few considerations would suffice to do away the presumption against the reality of those events, upon which Christ chiefly rested the divinity of his mission. Whoever believes in God, must allow that omnipotence is equal to the working of miracles : He, who appointed the usual order of nature, can surely make any occasional alteration in that order which he may think fit ; and if he
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think fit to send a new revelation of his will into the world, such a revelation must necessarily be accompanied by miracles; these are the best evidences of its truth, and the proper credentials of his minister: that they should be worked over again in successive ages, as often as the scepticism of individuals should require such an evidence, would be productive of no good consequence, as we have seen already: and lastly, to suppose that a set of men of like feelings and passions with ourselves should concur in attesting a series of miraculous events, of the truth or falsehood of which their own immediate senses were the judge; that, rather than renounce their belief in the truth of them, they should cheerfully embrace the bitterest torments that humanity can be made to suffer; and yet to have been deceived themselves, or actuated by any design of deceiving others, is a circumstance more extraordinary and more miraculous than any that are recorded in the Gospel history.

We come in the third place to consider the accomplishment of prophecy as a proof of divine revelation, and yet differing in point of force with the different circumstances

stances of mankind. But this furnishes too wide and varied a field of investigation to be justly comprehended within the limits of the present Discourse; it will therefore be attended to in the succeeding one.

Before I conclude, however, allow me to introduce two reflections, which may neither be unacceptable nor useless to those whose attention I particularly solicited at the commencement of these Lectures.

First, then, it may be observed, that the direct proofs of Christianity are such as may not upon all occasions prove conclusive to every turn of the human mind. It is possible that this may sometimes be the case: but let those who should be inclined to disbelieve the divine origin of Christianity attend to another argument, which seems not to have been often enough opposed to the enemies of the Gospel. Allowing Christianity to be “a cunningly devised fable,” how are we to account for its first propagation and subsequent establishment upon any principle, which is in unison with the common and acknowledged principles of human nature, and yet denies all supernatural assistance? The *reductio ad absurdum* is a mode
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of reasoning to which mathematicians occasionally resort, when the direct method cannot so well or so conveniently be used: it is less pleasing, perhaps, than the direct method, but in the end equally convincing. Endeavour then to account for the origin and progress of Christianity, upon the ground of its being an imposture; and if your reasonings are correct, if you violate in the progress of them no well-known principle of man's moral nature, you will be reduced to the necessity of admitting an evident absurdity, or of acknowledging the divine origin of the Christian religion.

2. Let us remember that absolute or demonstrative certainty is but seldom granted to mankind. In the most momentous concerns of life men are governed by belief rather than by knowledge; and is it therefore at all remarkable, that their views in regard to another life should be directed by a similar principle? Faith is frequently required of men under the Gospel regulations, as a branch of moral virtue; because he who appointed those regulations, and knew full well

what was in man, was sufficiently aware, that the nature of that assent which is demanded to the Gospel truths is less involuntary than many men are apt to imagine ; and that it would be no uncommon instance for men who disliked the duties, to renounce the doctrines of Christianity. The surest step to a firm belief in the promises of Christ, such a belief as shall become the best comforter in affliction, and the surest support in sickness and in death, is to begin with zealously practising the moral duties which he has enjoined. We have our blessed Saviour's declaration express to this point : " If any man will do his will, he " shall know of the doctrine, whether it be " of God, or whether I speak of myself." And besides, in calculating the evidences on either side, did there remain but enough to turn the balance in the slightest degree, was there but the weakest moral presumption in favour of the truth of Christianity, yet even then it would become every prudent and reflecting person, who is well acquainted with the nature of its contents, to form and fashion his life agreeably to its dictates ;
especially

especially too when he is informed, that by so doing he will not, in these times at least, sacrifice one jot of temporal convenience or comfort.

S E R M O N VII.

LUKE xvi. 31.

If they will not bear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead.

IN all his dealings with his creatures, the Almighty has at no time “left himself without witnesses :” but as to all the moral precepts he has delivered to them, he has annexed the most animating motives to obedience ; so in regard to the doctrines communicated to them, and to which their assent is required, in order to their becoming partakers in the blessings of revelation, he has accompanied these with evidences sufficiently numerous and weighty, to become the foundation of their firmest faith. Men are neither required to practise what is impossible to their strength, or prejudicial to their interest, nor to believe what in itself is in-

credible or contradictory, or unsupported by such testimonies as the position can well admit of, or be fairly said to require.

Yet the evidences for the truth of Christianity, many and full as we have reason to esteem them, have not been sufficient to command the assent of all mankind to whom they have been proposed. The Gospel was rejected by many to whom it was first preached, notwithstanding the evidence of miraculous powers exercised by its preachers; notwithstanding there was every testimony that the reason of man could possibly require, that the religion came from God, and that his arm was uplifted in its defence and advancement. And in our own times, it would not be difficult to point out many who are dissatisfied with the claims of Christianity to divine origin, and refuse to admit them upon the ground of insufficient evidence. It is, however, of no small importance to consider, that the number of those who have rejected the Gospel, after paying any sort of attention to the evidence which the Almighty has given in its favour, is extremely small, and shrinks into nothing, when compared with that host of believers
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upon principle and examination ; who have carefully weighed in the balance of sound reason both the arguments urged in favour of Christianity, and the objections usually brought against its truth ; who have been entirely divested of any interested considerations, which might make them unduly partial to either side of the question ; and who, after a laborious and patient investigation of every thing connected with the subject, have embraced the cross of Christ, as the safest anchor of their hopes, and the surest pledge of their immortality. As for the many who have rejected the Gospel, without subjecting its claims to such an examination, their defection makes nothing against the merits of our cause : whether they were blinded by prejudice, misled by passion, or seduced by the love of singularity, (and these are the most usual sources of infidelity,) it matters not ; the evidences of the divine origin of Christianity are precisely where they were, and have lost nothing of their weight, because they have been pronounced defective by men who never carefully estimated their strength.

It is the common complaint amongst mo-

dern infidels, that they are required to believe in Christianity upon evidence so much weaker, in their estimation, than that which, they are told, accompanied its first publication, and earlier progress. You tell us, say they, that when the Gospel was first preached to the world, its preachers performed many supernatural works, to which they appealed as proofs of their divine mission : shew us the same works now, and we will believe ; but do not require us to assent to its truth purely upon the ground of miracles, said to have been worked in its behalf a great many ages ago, and in a very distant country.

Now this objection we endeavoured to obviate in the preceding Discourse, by observing, that the Almighty, in this respect, has strictly conformed to that rule of order and proportion, which he appears to have proposed to himself in the whole of his communications with mankind. At the first preaching of the Gospel, when the disciples of Christ, in consequence of their profession, were called upon to brave the greatest worldly dangers, and to endure the very extremity of worldly suffering, a degree of evidence

dence the most immediate and direct, the most level to their comprehensions, the least liable to be mistaken, was necessary to support them under persecutions, and enable them to overcome the commonest and most imperious feelings of human nature; and this was supplied by miracles, which at once removed their doubts, and confirmed their resolutions. But when those worldly evils no longer threatened the Christian professor, it would have been superfluous to continue the evidence of miracles; they were now no longer necessary; “the word of God” grew mightily, and increased,” independent of their help; the well-authenticated narration of those miracles, which were requisite to foster the Gospel in its infancy, was found abundantly adequate to the purpose of advancing its maturer growth. And it is worthy of remark, and, considering the vast importance of a belief in Christianity to our everlasting interests, it is a circumstance which demands our warmest gratitude, that Almighty Providence should have so well secured the evidence resulting from the miracles wrought by Christ and his Apostles, that it should serve for the conviction of the
serious

serious and candid enquirer in after-ages : that he should have so connected the different circumstances, which must necessarily be taken into the account when the question of the truth of Christianity is fully investigated, that we cannot disbelieve the miraculous events recorded in the Gospel history, without admitting contradictions which can never be reconciled, and raising difficulties which can never be adjusted. If we suppose, that Christianity, so hostile as it certainly was to the particular prejudices of the people among whom it was first preached, as well as to the most darling corruptions of men's nature in general, and so destitute of all human aid and assistance, as we know it to have been, could have made such a progress in the world, without the divine interference exhibited in some way or other, we certainly shall give our assent to a position full as contradictory and impossible, as that the Almighty did really interpose, by signs and wonders, to sanction a system of religion so worthy of himself, and so necessary to the happiness of his creatures.

A miracle wrought in attestation of the truth of any religious position, is the shortest
and

and most direct mode of demonstration that can be adopted : it was therefore admirably well adapted to the character and condition of the Apostles, who had neither the leisure, nor the opportunities, nor the qualifications, which we possess, of collecting the divine origin of the Gospel from other and less obvious sources.

But it may well be questioned, whether the Christian enquirer at the present day, with the many intellectual advantages over the Apostles, which the advanced growth of the human understanding, the progress of science, the more careful exercise of the reasoning faculties, and, above all, the more thorough knowledge of the governing springs of human conduct, derived from a longer experience of human nature, have conspired to give him, whether such an one rises from the candid examination of the subject, with a degree of conviction less intense (if indeed conviction can be said to admit of degrees) than that which penetrated their hearts when they beheld Lazarus restored to life, or embraced their beloved Master again after his crucifixion.

But granting, what I conceive we are under

der no sort of necessity of doing, that these circumstances did not compensate for the want of miracles wrought before our eyes, and that, in consequence of that want, our faith in Christ should seem to rest upon a less firm foundation; yet be it remarked, that we have another mode of evidence held out to us, viz. accomplished and accomplishing prophecy: evidence equally strong with that of miracles, but which requires, perhaps, a greater share of intellectual acuteness, and a more extensive and abstracted application of the powers of the understanding, to make a fair and adequate estimate of its merits; and therefore, agreeably to the uniformity of the divine proceedings with man, it is in a more especial manner appointed as the ground-work of our faith in these days, when we are so much better able to examine its claims, than at any previous æra of the church history, from the creation to the present time.

That the accomplishment of prophecy served to enliven the faith of the Church, both under the Patriarchal, the Mosaic, and the earlier part of the Christian dispensations, is evident enough; but this could be
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only in an inferior and subordinate degree. Sensible appearances of the Deity in the former instance, and miracles in the two latter, were the principal, and, perhaps, the only effectual motives to belief. During the two first periods, the evidence arising from accomplished prophecy was but sparingly administered. Many prophecies were indeed delivered, but the accomplishment of them was reserved for more distant times. And the longer the world lasts, the more full and convincing will the argument drawn from this source become, until “ the glory of the
“ Lord shall be fully revealed, and all flesh
“ shall see together” the wisdom, the power, and the goodness of Him, who first created, who continually maintaineth, and who will finally perfect all things.

The argument derived from prophecy must therefore have wanted, during the earlier ages of the world, the greater part of that strength and conclusiveness, which we justly ascribe to it at present. It could not be otherwise : for whatever prophecies were accomplished within that period, they were necessarily of a local and limited nature ; a long course of ages could not have that air
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of solemnity and awfulness which attaches to the argument, when we regard the exact and circumstantial fulfilment of distant prophecies.

The principal event, to which the writings of the ancient prophets refer, is the coming of Christ; and it is truly wonderful to observe the exact coincidence between their predictions, and the evangelical histories. But with the evidence of miracles before their eyes, or fresh in their remembrance, the evidence arising from accomplished prophecies does not appear to be that upon which their faith was most firmly rested. That they felt its strength in some measure, is sufficiently plain; but this was not till their divine Instructor had in a miraculous manner opened their hearts, that they might understand the Scriptures; till he had corrected those erroneous notions and obstinate prejudices, which they held in common with the rest of their countrymen, respecting the character and person of the subject of the prophetic writings. But the argument, in all probability, was neither understood in its full extent, nor felt by them in all its force. The progress of intellectual improvement has
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contributed to give additional strength and beauty to the argument, from the fulfilment of the ancient prophecies of the coming and ministry of our blessed Lord; and the industry and acuteness of Christian writers in later ages have enabled them to discover such a variety of minute coincidences between the prophecies of the Old Testament, and the narratives of the New, in this respect, many of which were entirely overlooked, or not sufficiently attended to by the Apostles; that whoever considers the subject with that seriousness and attention which is due to it, will feel himself even more fully convinced than they could have been, from this evidence, that Jesus of Nazareth was of a truth HE of whom Moses and the Prophets did write, the promised Messiah of the Jews, and the long-expected Saviour of mankind. Let us hear no more, then, of these groundless complaints of a supposed deficiency in the evidences to the truth of our most holy religion, because the age of miracles has ceased; whereas the more sure word of prophecy lies open to us—a standing and continued miracle of itself—a species of evidence which can never grow old—
which

which time may strengthen, but cannot impair.

It is obvious to every one who examines the history of God's proceedings with his creatures, that the means which he at any time uses for the execution of his all-wise and most merciful purposes are neither more numerous, nor more effective, than just to produce the effect for which they were designed. And therefore miracles which are the best, and, according to our perceptions, the only means of effecting a great and sudden revolution in the sentiments and conduct of mankind, are never resorted to but upon occasions which fully justify their use, and demand their instrumentality. To do otherwise were, in the coarse but nervous language of Warburton, "to make an unnecessary waste of miracles, better calculated to confound our notions of the order of nature, than to evince the Lord and Ruler of it in the control of its usual course." Miracles, by being continually repeated, would in time cease to be such; they would lose all their force, together with their surprize and novelty; nor would they leave any more lively or more lasting impressions

pressions upon us, than such as may be kept up by those standing records and visible memorials, which now evidence to us the reality of their having been once wrought in behalf of Christianity.

We observed before, that miracles were not exhibited as the means of influencing the conduct of men, until a sufficient time had elapsed from the creation of the world, to bring them acquainted with the common course of nature, and the ordinary progress of the physical powers, in order that every occasional interposition of divine power should be more clearly understood as such, and have its due and genuine influence upon the feelings and actions of those who were called upon to witness it.

The age of miracles may be said to commence with the mission of Moses. Then they were peculiarly necessary to effect the deliverance of the Israelites. The prophecy, that they should at a certain time be delivered from the hands of their imperious taskmasters, would have been no argument to induce Pharaoh to release them, since even some of the most astonishing displays of divine power were hardly sufficient for

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this purpose. It is obvious how necessary miracles were to support the faith of the Israelites, and to preserve them in their allegiance to God during their pilgrimage in the wilderness, and for ages afterwards, whilst this other species of evidence, prophecy, was accumulating, upon which the faith of the Church was finally to rest. Miracles and sensible appearances of the Deity became gradually less frequent, from the final settlement of the government of the Jewish nation, to the Babylonish captivity. After this latter period, miracles and prophecies entirely ceased for some hundred years previous to the coming of Christ; no doubt, as it has been often remarked, to give greater force and splendour to his coming and mission. And it is worthy of observation also, that during the time of this cessation they were not necessary, as before, to preserve the people from falling into idolatry; for of that propensity they seem to have been entirely cured, and we hear of no relapse after their return from that captivity.

The fulfilment of prophecy, therefore, seems to be the evidence peculiarly adapted and addressed to us on whom the ends of the world

world are come ; who are much better able to appreciate the value of this evidence, and have a much larger mass of it subjected to our examination. Fresh miracles are not to be expected, unless the Almighty should vouchsafe a new revelation of his will to mankind, which we have no reason to look for, or not till the final consummation of all things. It is worthy of remark too, that sensible appearances of the Deity, as well as miracles, are, when compared with prophecy, a kind of evidence better adapted to the condition and feelings of a gross, and illiterate, and sensual people. They are evidences which come immediately home to their senses, and bring with them instant and decisive conviction. To appreciate them no previous knowledge is required, except what every man will readily acquire from his own observation and that of his ancestors, with respect to the usual course of nature. No extensive acquaintance with the history of mankind is necessary towards making a due estimate of their force ; they require rather the exercise of the senses, than that of the intellectual faculties.

But then how very different is the evi-

dence arising from prophecy in all these particulars, and how much better adapted to an age of science and literature ; when men are much better qualified to ascertain its true meaning, and to remark its correct accomplishment ! The impression made by a narration of past miracles, however well authenticated, would probably be much diminished in a course of ages, and at last might be entirely effaced, was it not corroborated by the additional evidence of accomplished prophecy. But when we see that, among all the changes and revolutions of the world, things are either in that state in which prophecy declares they shall be, or that they are gradually advancing towards such a state, this forms a most convincing evidence of revelation, which they who lived in the miraculous times could not possibly have ; neither was it necessary that they should, whilst they possessed another species of evidence, more direct and immediate, and better suited to their obtuse perceptions and their contracted knowledge of the history of the world.

In considering the argument for the truth of Christianity, which is deduced from the
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accomplishment of the prophecies contained in the Old and New Testaments, a vast variety of objects present themselves, each of which, singly considered, is deserving of our attention, as a strong and irrefragable proof of the divine origin of those writings in which they are contained: but it is impossible to pay a particular attention to every one, or even the principal part of them; we shall only select a few of the more striking and prominent, such as peculiarly demand our attention, from being illustrative of the principle upon which we have hitherto proceeded, viz. that as the divine government varies in other respects with the varying circumstances of his creatures; so, with regard to the evidences upon which he willed their faith in him at different periods to be founded, a proportionate difference is observable. But this diversity is strictly reconcilable with the uniformity of his wisdom and goodness, and furnishes a fresh subject for our admiration and our gratitude.

To every one who duly considers the nature of the Christian religion, and its close and necessary connection with man's best hopes and truest interests, it will appear to be

be of the utmost importance that the evidences of its truth should ever continue to ensure the conviction of the candid and rational part of mankind; and that as it seemed expedient to Almighty wisdom to discontinue the evidences which were necessary for its support at its first promulgation, he should have opened a new source of conviction, accessible to the devout enquirer in distant ages, and calculated to extinguish every uneasy doubt and scruple which should arise to weaken his belief, and sap the foundation of his dearest hopes.

The first prophecy which forces itself upon our notice, one of the first regarding the time of its delivery, and perhaps the most remarkable in point of literal accomplishment, is that well-known denunciation made to the Jews, by the ministry of Moses, in the twenty-eighth chapter of the Book of Deuteronomy. Their inspired lawgiver had now fully made known to them all the will of their God concerning them; he had explained their several duties to them with a degree of studious minuteness, which might seem somewhat unnecessary to us at this day, did we not carefully bear in mind the
condition

condition and necessities of mankind at that early period, and the peculiar character of that remarkable people to whom they were delivered. And at last, as a solemn and most affecting sanction of the laws he had given them, he describes at length both the consequences of their obedience and their disobedience; the rewards annexed to the one, and the punishments consequent to the other; and we need only open the page of history, or take but a very cursory view of the present condition of the descendants of Abraham, to be convinced how minutely and exactly every part of the remarkable prediction has been fulfilled.

After delivering particular instructions relative to political and religious duties, and fixing the particular rewards and punishments which were best calculated to secure public order and domestic happiness, the Jewish lawgiver pronounces in the most explicit terms to the Israelites, that peace, prosperity, and abundance should be the certain national rewards of their piety and observance of the divine commands; and that misery and war, attended with every public calamity and private affliction, should

be the certain national consequence of their disobedience. Predictions in general, as has been well observed, do not include such an alternative, since they have commonly a view to one fixed train of events, and no other. But we here find a twofold condition proposed, and the event was to be determined by the manner in which the Israelites should act; a circumstance peculiar to the laws of Moses. Other lawgivers had a view only to the immediate punishment of any individual subject: the Hebrew legislator goes much further; his declarations are extended to the future fortunes of his people in their collective and national capacity. He marks out the precise mode in which they were to be happy or miserable, and the particular circumstances in which they were to be involved in the course of a long series of ages. No legislator who was not inspired could possibly have anticipated a history so singular, and yet so faithful and minutely accurate.

In considering this remarkable prediction, and estimating the weight which the correct fulfilment of it gives to the truth of revelation, it is of importance to remark, that
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there are no circumstances which can incline us to believe that Moses spake not as one inspired, but from a superior knowledge of the human character, a greater experience of the sources of national exaltation or disgrace, and of the usual and uniform tendency of modes of human conduct. For, first, this is a greater degree of knowledge and information than could have been possessed by any uninspired individual at that early period of human history, when the stock of political knowledge furnished by experience must have been extremely small; nor with all the experience with which the accumulated history of ages has furnished the most sagacious enquirer into human nature in these latter days, would he have described the future consequences of national conduct in other than very general terms, nor could his descriptions possibly hold good beyond a very limited period. And again, the experience of the fates and fortunes of other nations could have done nothing towards enabling him to foretel the future destiny of his own. For no nation was so peculiarly circumstanced, none so distinguished from the rest of mankind by remarkable laws, customs,

toms, and character. The conclusion, therefore, is obvious, that at the time when Moses lived, he could not have had the example of any other nation before his eyes, whose vicissitudes of fortune furnished any ground for the conditions which he proposed to his countrymen. The uncommon fate of an uncommon nation is pronounced at a distance of time, when no reach of human foresight, no calculation of human chances, could possibly extend to the successive and distant parts of their history.

It would lead us into too prolix a detail at present to examine every part of this most wonderful prophetic declaration, and to point out how exactly each has been verified in the event. Suffice it to observe, that the promises of national prosperity and peace were uniformly awarded to them as long as they continued steadfast in the service of their Almighty Sovereign, and that they were duly made to taste of the punishments denounced against their disobedience. And this information we have from a succession of Jewish writers, who mention the facts with the most undesigning simplicity, and without any sort of marked and studied reference

ference to the declaration of the prophecy itself. But there are one or two circumstances in the predicted condition of Judæa and her children, which deserve an especial notice, both on account of their singularity, and the utter impossibility of their being descried by any but the eye of Omniscience, and because the fulfilment of this part of the prophecy is yet fresh and obvious, and continually offers itself to our observation.

“ And if ye will not hearken unto me,
“ then will I punish you seven times more
“ for your sins ; your land shall not yield
“ her increase, neither shall the trees of the
“ land yield their fruits. And I will bring
“ the land into desolation, and your enemies
“ which dwell therein shall be astonished at
“ it : and your land shall be desolate, and
“ your cities waste.” Such was the awful declaration of the Prophet ; and such has been the state of the holy land ever since the judgments of God have fallen upon the Jews in consequence of their manifold and continued transgressions. After their expulsion by the Romans, it was left a prey to neglect and barrenness. During the crusades, it was
perpe-

perpetually ravaged by contending armies ; and since it has been a province of the Turkish empire, it has exhibited the same scene of desolation. The face of the country, once so populous and flourishing, has for many ages presented nothing but mean villages, thinly inhabited, ruins of ancient buildings, fields uncultivated, naked hills and barren rocks. Every traveller, in short, that has visited the land of Judæa in modern times, speaks of it as evidently labouring under the heavy curse and severe judgment of a justly offended Deity.

Again, it was foretold of the Jews, that if they rebelled against the commandments of their God, and it was foreseen that they would do so, that they should be driven from out their own land, and be scattered among all people, from one end of the earth even unto the other ; but that they should still be kept distinct from all nations, and be a proverb and a bye-word among every nation in which they should be found. How precisely this part of the Jewish lawgiver's prediction has been fulfilled, is evident to every one, who considers how widely this remarkable people has been dispersed in almost

most every part of the habitable globe ; that in every place where they are settled, they continue unmixed with the people around them ; and that the name of a Jew is to this day a term of reproach and infamy, implying the exercise of some of the meanest and vilest propensities of man's corrupt nature.

A late noble writer, who was never supposed to have any particular attachment to the cause of Christianity, was yet induced in a serious conversation to declare, that the present state of the Jews furnished an argument for the truth of revelation, not easily evaded by any sophistry, nor overcome by any reasoning : that it was a circumstance too remarkable to be ascribed to chance, or the operation of mere human means, and that therefore the finger of God was, in all probability, concerned in its production. Had Moses delivered this declaration of the future fortunes of his people as an uninspired man, and merely from a superior knowledge of the human character, and a more complete experience of the usual course of the moral world, he would never have thought of circumstances in the punishment of the Jews so extraordinary and unparalleled.

leled. He might naturally have imagined, that their disobedience and wickedness would eventually be the means of delivering them into the hands of their enemies; but it would not be equally natural for him to suppose, that they should be utterly expelled from their native country, or that their land should be rendered barren and desolate for their wickedness, or that they should be continued a separate people, and not, as is the most usual fate of conquered nations, be blended in time with their conquerors. These circumstances give to the prophecy of Moses a very peculiar and distinguishing cast, and the complete fulfilment of it in these particulars is an evidence of divine interposition, which every day gathers fresh strength, and shines with increasing splendor.

The whole history of the Jews, from the call of their great progenitor down to the present time, is full of wonders, and presents us with a series of events unparalleled in the annals of mankind. Numerous as they afterwards proved to be, we see them raised up from a man, who, in the Scripture language, “was as good as dead;” who, together with his wife, had arrived at a period

riod when no issue could be expected from them, according to the usual operations of nature. We see them undergoing a long and most grievous captivity in Egypt, yet kept apart as a peculiar people, and afterwards emerging from it with increased numbers and strength—kept for a continuance of years wandering in a desert, whilst the divine purposes respecting their future destination were gradually advancing to maturity. We see them continually environed with dangers, which threatened their very national existence, and yet as often delivered by means which fall not within the ordinary compass of human observation. After a long and severe opposition from the nations around them, after a splendid course of victories which are justly referable to more than human exertions, we see them exalted to a very high degree of national glory and preeminence; yet not long after their glory begins to fade, they are stript of their honours, they are trodden under foot of their enemies, and carried away captive into a strange land. Still, however, they are preserved: though their civil polity be broken in pieces, they subsist as a distinct people, and

and after a time, under the guidance of their Almighty Sovereign, are restored to their native land, and the free and undisturbed exercise of their religious usages. At length, when the fulness of their iniquities seemed to demand such a tremendous exercise of divine vengeance, we behold them overwhelmed in one general and sweeping destruction, their city laid waste, their temple, the general bond of union to every Israelite, razed to the ground, and themselves banished for ever, as it should seem, from their native soil. Yet even under these circumstances, which in ordinary cases would have contributed, in a great measure, to blot out their remembrance as a people, we see them still distinguished by that peculiarity of fortune which had been attached to the whole of their previous history ; although “ sifted as “ it were with a sieve” amongst all the nations of the earth, they continue separate from, and unmixed with, any of them ; and, in spite of the many oppressions and persecutions they have at times been made to undergo, as numerous, as rich, and as flourishing a people, as in the times of their greatest national splendor. Nor is this all. The
dealings

dealings of the Almighty with them as a peculiar people are not at an end. To what purpose can we conceive them thus wonderfully preserved, but to become the subjects of another and more important revolution, than any which has hitherto affected them? Our descendants, perhaps of no very remote date, may witness the time, when that cup of bitterness, of which they have so largely been made to drink, shall pass away from them, when the Lord, mindful of the righteousness of faithful Abraham, and of the oath which he swore unto Isaac, shall again receive their descendants to his favour—when their long lost Canaan shall be restored to them—when Jerusalem shall again be built as a city which is at unity in itself—when Zion shall once more become “the joy of the whole earth,” and the centre from whence new and continued streams of divine majesty and mercy shall flow to the uttermost parts of the world.

But, without anticipating events, the full developement of which rests in the good pleasure of the Most High, we may observe, once for all, that the principal circumstances in the Jewish History, with which we are al-

ready acquainted, are of so very singular a cast and character; they lie so wide of the ordinary course of human calculation, and have so little in common with the fates and fortune of all other nations, that, to give a satisfactory account of them, we not only may reasonably, but must necessarily have recourse to the direct interference of God: no other solution can for a moment be admitted: we are constrained to apply generally the language of the Psalmist on a subject of particular import: “This is the Lord’s doing, “and it is marvellous in our eyes.”

There are also many other predictions contained in the Scriptures, which are particularly deserving of our attention, inasmuch as the accomplishment of them is not only to be gathered from history, but lies open to our daily inspection; and thus the evidence hence resulting gathers strength, instead of being weakened, by the lapse of ages. Of this kind is the prophecy concerning Ishmael and his descendants, one of the most extraordinary of any which we meet with in the Old Testament. By way of reparation for the heritage which he had lost by the birth of Isaac, God gave him the wilderness into
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which his mother had fled with him, in
which he was to erect a kingdom under the
most improbable circumstances that can well
be imagined. “ His hand was to be against
“ every man, and every man’s hand against
“ him. By his sword he was to live, and to
“ pitch his tent in the face of his brethren.”
“ Never (says a modern traveller) has pro-
“ phecy been so completely fulfilled. The
“ power of the Arab descendants of Ishmael
“ subsisted from the earliest ages : it was ve-
“ rified before the time of Moses ; in the
“ time of David and Solomon : it subsisted
“ in the time of Alexander, and in that
“ of Augustus Cæsar : it subsisted in the time
“ of Justinian ; all very distant and uncon-
“ nected periods ; and I appeal to the evi-
“ dence of mankind, without apparent sup-
“ port and necessity, but what it has derived
“ from God’s promise only, if it is not in
“ full vigour at this present day.” This pro-
phesy therefore is of itself a sufficient proof,
without any other, of the divine authority
of the Scriptures.

Again : the Almighty is introduced by the
Prophet Ezekiel making this awful declara-
tion respecting Egypt : “ I will bring again

“ the captivity of Egypt, and they shall be
“ there a base kingdom ; it shall be the basest
“ of kingdoms ; neither shall it exalt itself any
“ more above the nations ; for I will di-
“ minish them, that they shall no more rule
“ over the nations.” Now, of the complete
accomplishment of this prediction we have
the testimony of the most authentic history,
and the evidence of every one who is at all
acquainted with the condition of that once
mighty nation, at the present day. Even
infidels themselves have been struck with the
lamentable reverse of fortune, which has
been attached to the country of Egypt, for
nearly three thousand years, and is yet its
appointed portion.

Where are the great and flourishing cities
of Babylon and of Tyre ? Precisely in that
very situation in which it was declared they
should be, so many ages ago by the inspired
Prophets : the one a dreary and desolate wil-
derness, the habitation of howling beasts and
noxious reptiles ; and the other a rock for
fishers to dry their nets upon. Surely when
we consider these things, when we examine
the ancient prophecies of the ancient Scrip-
tures, and remark their exact fulfilment at
the

the present day, we dare not complain that the evidences of revelation are insufficient, and that we need the operation of miracles to awaken our faith and to animate our hopes.

Lastly, for it would be endless to particularize the argument from accomplished prophecy, which is presented to us in these latter days, instead of the sensible miracles which supported the faith of the Church in the earlier ages of its existence, let us remark the promise which Christ has given of perpetual defence and protection to his Church. He has declared that the gates of hell shall not prevail against it, and that he will be with his faithful followers unto the end of the world. As far as reaches to us, this promise of our blessed Redeemer has been entirely fulfilled. It is true, that the time to which he has extended his promise of protection is yet at an indefinite distance ; but the argument therefore loses very little of its weight and force. We can hardly conceive any more formidable difficulties to present themselves in the way of Christianity, than those which it has already encountered

tered and overcome. It has triumphed over the prejudices of the Jewish rulers, the pride of the Greek philosophers, and the cruelty of the Roman emperors. It has survived the sanguinary attacks of ten persecutions, unequalled in the refinements of barbarity by any other events in the history of mankind. It has victoriously withstood the corruption both of the Roman and the Mohammedan Antichrists: and what is more than all, it has escaped the hidden snares, and subtle devices of modern Philosophists, whose endeavours to eradicate men's belief in Christianity have been unwearied, and yet conducted in a way the most likely, according to human views, to ensure success. Yet all have failed. The Church of Christ is founded upon a rock, against which the storms and tempests of worldly opposition must beat in vain. The very means, which the adversaries of Christianity have made use of in order to her overthrow, have contributed eventually to render her more settled and secure: and it may be that the Almighty has permitted the attacks of vain and wicked men against the religion

gion which his beloved Son died to establish, that the Church might have an additional confirmation to her faith, in witnessing their complete overthrow.

SERMON VIII.

HEB. xii. 25.

See that ye refuse not him that speaketh: for if they escaped not, who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we refuse him that speaketh from heaven.

THE splendour and beauty of the works of God, as exhibited in the visible creation, are the subject of admiration and praise to the most careless and superficial observer; it needs but the exercise of his ordinary senses and feelings to make him join in the pious exclamation of the Psalmist, “O Lord, how “glorious are thy works!” But on giving them a more minute and particular attention, we shall discover in the greater part, if not in all of them, most evident traces of uniform subserviency to one great and benevolent purpose. Infinitely diversified as the several parts of nature appear to be, yet they

they all harmonize to the same point, the general advantage of the whole. Various as are the modes of working which the Almighty has adopted, yet they are all fitted for the production of good, and, by being varied, for the production of the greater good. But (as we have taken occasion to observe before) though it would be highly reasonable to expect the same uniform wisdom and goodness to shine out in the various methods by which God governs the moral world, as well as the natural ; and though the pious believer entertains no doubt at all, but that such is really the case ; yet this is a truth less obvious to our perceptions, and of which the proofs are apparently less numerous and striking. We have not, neither can we have in this life, understanding and knowledge sufficient to enable us to take in the whole of the vast scheme of God's moral government, and to remark in every minute instance of its exercise a beneficial design ; and to observe it, however varying in its forms at different periods, with the varying circumstances of human condition, yet bearing a fixed and steadfast aspect towards the accomplishment of those gracious promises

of

of Omnipotence which were planned before the beginning of the world. Such a transcendant degree of knowledge will in all probability form a portion of the enjoyments of the blessed in heaven ; and is therefore most properly reserved for our entrance into that state, when this mortal shall put on immortality, when the veil of corruption shall be taken away from our eyes, and all the hidden things of God, at least such as relate to ourselves, shall be fully and clearly made known to us.

Seeing therefore that a perfect view of the connection subsisting between every part of God's proceedings with his creatures, and their improvement and final happiness, is withheld from us at present, it is of the utmost consequence to our faith and our hopes, that we diligently investigate the subject, and carefully collect the many instances in which such a connection is evident and undeniable. Much of this kind has been discovered already ; much perhaps remains to be discovered, to reward the patient and laborious investigator ; and the greater number of instances we can produce, in which those exercises of the divine government,

vernment, which seemed at the time hostile to the interests of his creatures, were eventually effective instruments of their advancement, the more firmly shall we substantiate the general principle to which other instances, in which such a tendency is not so easily discoverable, may by analogy be referred.

We can never too often urge the necessity we are under, of considering the operations of Almighty power and wisdom, taken together as a whole, and with reference to one great and important end. We can thus only form a correct notion respecting them, as far at least as weak and finite creatures can be conceived capable of comprehending the counsels of Omnipotence. But if we confine our attention to detached parts only of the government of God, unconnected with one another, or with his gracious designs towards his creatures, which have been from the beginning, and to the furtherance of which all his communications with them should be referred, we shall assuredly fall into errors of a very dangerous nature; we shall haughtily decide upon what we know nothing of, and shall either
be

be led, in our childish arrogance and conceit, to censure the designs of Almighty power and wisdom, or to reject the authority of that blessed book, in which all his operations are written. For, we repeat, the whole of God's revealed dealings with his creatures is to be considered as a piece of most complicated machinery, and many of its necessarily component parts, when viewed by themselves, might appear to us both superfluous and inelegant, because we should, on such a survey of them, be entirely ignorant of their proper use and application. But let these be fairly pointed out : let the use of the most apparently inelegant part of this complex machine be described : let the eventual application to the interests of man of those instances in the divine proceedings, which have most excited the profane derision of the infidel, be exhibited : let this be done, as we conceive it may fully and without difficulty, and the objection is at once got over ; the triumph of the objector ceases, and is converted into shame and disgrace.

These considerations prompted the original choice of the subject to the several branches of which I have solicited your attention,

tention, through the course of these lectures : and, though the argument was of sufficient importance to have well deserved the treatment of a much abler hand, yet, it is humbly presumed, enough has been advanced upon this interesting subject, to confirm and illustrate the principle upon which we first set out, viz. that harmony, and order, and proportion characterize all the operations of divine power, with which we are at all acquainted, or in which we are anywise interested ; that, in the greatest diversity of operation, his wisdom and his goodness are uniformly the same ; and that, in all the communications of his will which he has made to his creatures, whether for the purpose of enlightening their understandings, or influencing their moral conduct, as supplying the evidences of faith in the materials of hope, he has upon every occasion, with a degree of precision which demands alike our admiration and our gratitude, accommodated himself to the character and necessities of his people at each distinct period ; supplying them with just such a measure of divine knowledge as their faculties and comprehensions were fitted to receive and retain ;
prescribing

prescribing exactly such a form of worship as was best adapted to animate their devotion, to keep alive their obedience, and to preserve them from the many temptations to which their own condition, and the circumstances of the times, most strongly exposed them ; and, lastly, affording them such testimonies of the reality of his interposition in the concerns of men for each of these purposes, as the necessity of the case required ; more full and striking when requisite to help the feebleness of the human intellect, or to support the professors of religion under the violence of persecution ; less direct and obvious in seasons of greater tranquillity, or more marked by the progress of general knowledge. And it may not unreasonably be hoped, that the arguments resulting from a view of the subject, in each of these particulars, may be conceived to give additional force to those which are usually adduced as internal proofs of the truth of Revelation ; especially too, as many of them are founded upon those passages in the history of mankind, that, for want of such a consideration, have most frequently excited the sneer of Infidelity, or proved
heavy

heavy stumbling-blocks in the way of the more serious enquirer.

A short review of the principal remarks in vindication of the wisdom and justice of the different modes of procedure, which the Almighty has thought proper to adopt, in regard to the chief subjects of discussion, as it is not, I believe, unusual in exercises of this kind, will not be deemed superfluous in this place.

It was a leading and fundamental principle, evident from all that we know of the history of our species, that the purposes of God for the improvement and final exaltation of man were intended to operate by slow and almost imperceptible degrees of advancement. It was clearly in his power to have adopted another and more expeditious method ; but then this, according to our conceptions, could not have been made use of, without introducing a sudden and entire revolution into the human character, without absolutely controlling the free exercise both of the powers of his understanding, and the feelings of his heart ; and to do this, at least in any very sudden and hasty manner, evidently appears not to have
formed

formed any part of his original plan ; and why it did not, is none of our business, and certainly none of our piety, to ask ; it is amply sufficient for every candid and reflecting enquirer to know what the purposes of his Creator respecting him have been, in what way and by what means those purposes were to be advanced, and above all, that the means which have been adopted were the most effectual, under all the circumstances of every peculiar case, towards their advancement.

It was natural therefore for us to expect, that in the earlier periods of the history of our species, and such as answer to the state of infancy in the individual, a mode of institution should be adopted, analogous to that which is usually applied to that state ; that the Almighty Instructor of mankind should make a more frequent and striking manifestation of himself by sensible appearances ; that his communications with them should be more numerous and intimate, and the lessons which he gave them more plain and obvious, than at succeeding periods of greater improvement ; and accordingly, in searching into the interesting accounts which are yet
s preserved

preserved of this part of our history, we find that such was precisely the way in which he graciously condescended to deal with them ; adjusting all his dispensations to their capacities, making every consistent allowance for the weakness and forwardness of childhood, hearing their complaints, enduring even their expostulations, and continually exhibiting himself to them as occasion seemed to require, for the purposes of instruction, of exhortation, of correction, of encouragement. And the principle which we all along adopted, the soundness of which is established by the voice of history, will make it less singular and less surprising to us, than it has appeared to others, who have not founded their reasonings upon this principle, that notwithstanding every advantage of this kind presented to mankind, they should yet for the most part have testified an imperfect and unwilling obedience to the ordinances of their heavenly Sovereign ; or that, upon more than one occasion, their defection should be so general and so flagrant, as to make it necessary that they should become, for the warning of others, most terrible examples of his justice and his power.

The

The call of Abraham, and the confining to his family and descendants, for a very considerable period, all divine communication, making them the subjects of an especial providence, is another circumstance, which has much scandalized the piety of those who are more fond of considering, how the Almighty ought to have acted according to their notions of his attributes, than how he really has acted. It is one part of the divine economy, which more than almost any other has supplied the unbeliever with the ground of plausible objections to the truth of the Mosaic history. Now, in addition to what has been said before upon this subject, we have a few remarks to make, which we conceive will sufficiently obviate the difficulties that have been raised from the selection which God made of the Jewish people for these important purposes.

1. This has been stated as an instance of arbitrary partiality, utterly inconsistent with every idea we can form of divine justice and wisdom.

It is always considered as a fair and sufficient answer to any alleged difficulty in

those particular dealings of God with his creatures, which revelation acquaints us with, that similar and as great difficulties exist in the common and ordinary dispensations of Providence. Supposing then the objection before us to proceed from one who believes in the existence and attributes of God, and such only are entitled to our notice, let us ask him, whether no instances of apparent partiality occur in that part of his government, which we know from daily observation and experience. Can it be denied, that there is as great a difference in the measure of those blessings, which proceed ultimately from God, vouchsafed to different portions of mankind, as in the case of the Israelites, the chosen subjects of divine instruction, and of the Gentiles left in a great measure to their own inventions in matters of religion? Those things which are most intimately connected with the comforts of our present existence, the goods of fortune, of health, of understanding, of temper, is there no inequality in the distribution of these? or rather, is not their distribution in the highest degree unequal? Why then should we be startled at a difficulty in revelation, when the
same

same difficulty in natural religion gives us little or no trouble ? Why should it be imagined more an instance of arbitrary partiality in the Almighty, to have made such a distinction between the Israelites and the rest of mankind, than for him to distinguish, as he always has done, between individuals, in regard to the measure of corporeal and intellectual strength allotted them, between communities in regard to the progress in civilization they have been allowed to make, or between countries in regard to the advantages of fertility of soil and local situation.

2. But Abraham had in a very especial manner commended himself to the Father of Wisdom ; he had been tried in a most severe balance, and had not been found wanting ; he had shewn himself willing and ready to obey the commandment of God, upon an occasion when that commandment was most completely at variance with his dearest feelings, and his most darling hopes. Our gracious Father condescends to deal with us on every occasion (so far as may be done) as under that relation we would deal with one another. Is it therefore, according

to such a view of the subject, any thing strange or unjust that he should adopt, as his peculiar favourites, the descendants of a man, whose obedience had been so well pleasing to him, and which he had in a most solemn manner sworn to reward? When we consider the many excellencies discernible in the characters of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as they are portrayed by the hand of Moses, why should we think it any thing improper, that their posterity should be peculiarly distinguished by him, who has declared, that “He will have mercy upon
“ thousands in them that fear him and keep
“ his commandments?”

3. But the selection of the Jews as the depositaries of divine knowledge could not be a measure of undue partiality, because the consequences of that selection were intended to be of universal and lasting import. Instead of my own words, allow me to give you those of the venerable Apologist of the Bible. “If we consider (says he) the act of
“ appointing the Jews as God’s peculiar
“ people, as unconnected with every other,
“ it may appear to be a partial display of
“ his goodness; it may excite doubts concerning

“ cerning the wisdom or benignity of his
“ divine nature. But if we connect the his-
“ tory of the Jews with that of other na-
“ tions, from the most remote antiquity to
“ the present time, we shall discover that
“ they were chosen, not so much for their
“ own benefit, or on account of their own
“ merit, as for the general benefit of man-
“ kind. To the Egyptians, Chaldeans, Greeks,
“ and Romans, to all the people of the earth,
“ they were formerly, and they are still to
“ all civilized nations, a beacon set upon a
“ hill, to warn them from idolatry, and to
“ light them to the sanctuary of a God,
“ holy, just, and true.” To this it may be
added, that the many lamentable reverses of
fortune, which this remarkable people were
made to undergo at different times, were not
unimportant in their consequences towards
advancing the all-gracious purposes of God ;
their frequent captivities were of undoubted
use in diffusing more generally the seeds of
true religion. It is possible that the Jews
might have borrowed some of the corrup-
tions of the people to whom they were in
bondage ; but then it is reasonable to sup-
pose that these acquired of them some no-
tices

tices of a purer faith in return ; and by these means, in addition to the many others already pointed out, which Almighty Wisdom adopted for this purpose, was the world prepared for the due reception of that last and most glorious communication of his will, which he has made to mankind, by the coming and ministry of his Son Jesus Christ. “ Why then,” in the words of the learned Prelate above quoted, “ should the Jewish
 “ dispensation, on account of its singularity,
 “ awaken the uneasy scruples of one class of
 “ mankind, or how can it be said to justify
 “ the profane sarcasms of another, when,
 “ even from the little we can understand of
 “ it, we can see that it is founded in wisdom,
 “ carried on for the general good, and ana-
 “ logous to all that reason teaches us con-
 “ cerning the nature of God ?”

Yet farther : to keep alive in the world the knowledge and worship of the one only true God, was, as we have more than once remarked already, a primary and continued object of the selection of the Jewish people : that this great and important object was sufficiently answered by that selection, and the other subsequent and subordinate means
 which

which it pleased the Creator to adopt, needs not now to be proved. That they continued uniformly in the pure profession of the faith delivered to them, that they did not upon occasions fall into very lamentable corruptions, is more than we are contending for, because it is more than their history will warrant ; nay, it is more than there was any reason to expect, considering the condition of the Jews, and the manner in which the divine communications were intended to operate upon them : for it was not the design of these, any more than of that degree of religious knowledge, and the nature of the encouragements to religious practice which we are possessed of, to overrule entirely the free-agency of men, and to break in pieces the power of worldly temptations. Therefore that the Jews occasionally sinned against the light held out to them, that they found the sollicitations of passion too strong at times for the calls of duty, is a charge which they may fairly divide with men living in times of greater intellectual strength, and under a more perfect and sublime religious dispensation.

But in comparing the history of the Jews
with

with that of any other nation, however refined, the difference in their religious character strikes with no inconsiderable force. In the case of the one the general rule is—a people professing the unity of the Godhead, and abhorring the worship of idols : their occasional relapses into polytheism and idolatry, in consequence of the sensual attractions connected with those corruptions, form only the exceptions from such general rule. In the case of the other the general rule is—a people absolutely and universally sunk in all the dirt and darkness of religious corruption, nor is the dreary picture ever relieved by even an occasional gleam of their adopting a simpler mode of faith, or a more pure form of moral observance. We are speaking of the people at large, for as to the opinions of a few solitary philosophers, they were neither sufficiently well founded, nor could they be so authoritatively enforced, as to produce any effectual change in the belief and manners of the generality of their countrymen.

It should seem then, upon a general review of this subject, that the selection of the people of Israel was intended to answer, and
really

really did answer, many most valuable and important purposes. At a time when “dark-
“ness covered the earth, and gross darkness
“the people,” there was one nation, upon whom “the light shined,” and continued burning till the glorious rising of the “Sun
“of Righteousness :” there was one people, which in their usual observance and continued profession maintained that doctrine which is the foundation of all true religion, the unity and spirituality of the Godhead. Situated as they were, in the midst of those nations which had been most early civilized, and, from their habits and customs, were best qualified to diffuse the blessings of civilization, the land of Judæa was a sort of central point, from whence the rays of divine truth might illuminate the world. The purposes of God were designed to work in a gradual and progressive manner, and, as we have seen already, the selection of the Jews operated in such a manner towards advancing those purposes of heavenly wisdom and goodness. For the Jews, however contemptuously they might have been spoken of by men who regarded rather their present than their
former

former character, were at one time a great and remarkable nation ; their fame had spread abroad through a large portion of the earth ; their history, and the peculiar form of government under which they lived, were by no means unknown ; and studious and reflecting men would naturally be led to remark the relation between the moral and religious character of the Jews, and their consequent temporal condition ; the doctrinal tenets of such a singular nation would be particularly investigated ; the unity of the Godhead, and the absurdity of idolatry, were doctrines, which, when once proposed to such men, would awaken their most serious attention, and in the end demand their warmest assent ; though the interestedness of one part of their countrymen, and the fanaticism of another, should prevent the open avowal of such doctrines, yet they would not easily be lost ; they would be cherished in secret, till the time should at length come, when the idols of the heathen should bow at the feet of Jesus of Nazareth, when a code should be established of supreme excellence and purity, and all

man-

mankind called upon to acknowledge in that their only hopes of happiness in this life, and of glory in that which is to come.

Volumes might be written upon this subject; but what has been said is sufficient to vindicate the wisdom and justice of God, in selecting a particular people, and that people the descendants of Abraham, as the chosen depositaries, for a time, of all true religion.

In pursuing our enquiries into the minuter divisions of the subject proposed, it was remarked, that in the impartition of divine knowledge to mankind at different periods, an especial regard was had to their respective characters and circumstances in each, and their progress in intellectual cultivation. And on this account we found reason to praise the wisdom of God, in withholding from the people of Israel some important doctrines, which were afterwards made known to mankind, because their minds were not sufficiently strengthened to receive them : they would have been scandalized, and offended at some of them, and the delivery of others would, in all probability, at that time have occasioned their deeper

deeper fall into the darling sin of idolatry, to rescue them from which was the object of so many divine interferences manifested to them, of the numerous and minute observances enjoined them in the Mosaic ritual, of the most remarkable events which befel them in the successive periods of their history, nay, which was a principal object of their being gathered out from the rest of the children of men, to be a chosen and separate people, that “they might worship “the Lord their God, and serve him alone.” There were many things which Christ in his last conversation with his disciples had to say unto them, but they were not at that time able to bear them; the powerful influence of the Holy Ghost was requisite to illuminate their understandings and dissipate the clouds of Jewish prejudice, that they might more fully understand the Scriptures, and more clearly comprehend the nature and objects of their blessed Lord’s mission.

When we considered the different forms of religious worship prescribed to mankind, at different periods, and under different dispensations, the contrast was complete and striking; and being connected with our
leading

leading position, furnished an additional reason for adoring the wisdom and goodness of God, in thus graciously accommodating his government in every age to the situation and character of those who were to be its objects. The pompous ceremonies enjoined by the Jewish religion, the magnificence of the temple, glittering with gold and precious stones, the splendour of the sacerdotal habits, the frequent and mysterious celebrations at the altar, were all admirably well calculated to excite the awe and to call out the devotion of a gross and carnal people, whose heart could only be approached through the channels of sense: the multiplied and operose observances of the Levitical law were necessary, and even these were not at all times completely effectual against their relapsing, at every turn, into the degrading errors and impure practices of their idolatrous neighbours. To maintain the propriety of continuing the splendid and complex apparatus of religious worship, at a time when the necessity which occasioned its first appointment no longer exists, as is done by the members of one Christian community at the present day, is surely to run counter

counter to the benevolent purposes of God in the progressive improvement of the human intellect; it evinces a most unpardonable misconception of the simplicity and spirituality of the Christian religion, and can have no other tendency than to rob mankind of that glorious liberty, wherewith Christ hath made them free, and to bring them back again to that state of captivity to sense, and obtuseness of religious feeling, which characterized the Jews in the time of Moses.

Again, a proportionate difference was observable, not so much perhaps in the nature, as in the degree and extent of the moral duties proposed to mankind at different periods of their intellectual growth. The morality both of the Old, as well as the New Testament, is in its source and principle precisely the same: the love of God, of his neighbour, and the government of himself, made up the whole of man's practical duty in the former case, as it does in the latter. But under the Christian dispensation, these several parts of moral obligation are considerably increased in point of intenseness, branched out into a greater variety of interesting

teresting divisions, and recommended by new sanctions and fresh motives to obedience; and this in perfect conformity with that rule of order and proportion, which the Almighty has constantly observed throughout the whole scheme of his government of his creatures. The rewards, which are promised as the consequences of moral obedience to the Christian, are of a much nobler cast, and are with justice much more highly appreciated by the disciples of Christ, than those which were held out to the Israelites in the time of Moses. It is therefore nothing but reasonable, the law of order and proportion requires it, that a much warmer degree of devotion towards God, a greater portion of love towards our neighbour, together with a more liberal extension of the appellation, and a more strict and peremptory control of the baser affections of our nature, should distinguish us who have been called to the glorious privileges of the Gospel, than could have been, consistently, required of men under the Primeval, the Patriarchal, or the Mosaic dispensations.

Lastly, it was observed, that the evidence, upon which God has founded the faith of

his Church in different periods, was different, rather in its nature, than in its weight and conclusiveness, contrary to what we had remarked before, of the difference in moral obligation, at distinct periods. Every system of religion must necessarily consist of two parts, speculative doctrines and practical rules; and in determining that a religion came from God, it is not enough that we prove that the former of these are agreeable to the reason of man, and that the latter have an obvious tendency to promote his best and truest interests: something more than this was requisite to command the assent of mankind to the divine origin of Christianity at its first promulgation, and still is requisite; for the strictness of the Gospel morality has, in too many instances, become the source of infidelity to corrupt and profligate men, and the peculiar doctrines of the revelation of Christ are still to many, what the whole system was to the Greeks of old, "Foolishness."

Because miracles, which were necessary to the support of revelation in its earliest and most tempestuous times, are no longer wrought in attestation of its truth, therefore it

it has been insinuated, that none ever were wrought ; that the narration of past miracles, however well authenticated, is at best but a very suspicious ground of assent, because every miracle, according to them, is as improbable, as any evidence can render it probable. This sophistry, for I am persuaded it deserves no other name, we have endeavoured to expose, and have shewn, that the charge of credulity belongs as much to them who believe that Christianity as to its origin was of human device, and that its advancement may be satisfactorily explained upon strictly human principles, as to those who believe in the reality of those divine interpositions which are alleged to have taken place at the first promulgation of Christianity, and to have accompanied its farther progress, even though they saw them not with their eyes.

And even granting that the argument from miracles lost much of its force in the lapse of ages from their discontinuance, yet that deficiency, as we have seen in the preceding lecture, is most amply made up to the Christian at the present era, by the additional argument drawn from accomplished

and accomplishing prophecy, which continue to gather fresh strength, and to shine with a purer lustre as the world advances. The exact fulfilment of many prophecies since the time when miracles ceased, and the longer continuance of states and kingdoms in that condition, in which it was foretold they should be, and in which they had begun to be before that cessation, make the argument from prophecy more conclusive to us, than it could be to the earlier professors of Christianity. We have all the evidence which they had, and much more superadded. They, for instance, saw the destruction of Jerusalem, and the dispersion of the Jews, in conformity to the declarations of Moses and of Christ. This evidence we also have, and besides, that of the Jews still continuing in a dispersed and separate state, and Jerusalem still trodden down of the Gentiles, according to “the sure word of prophecy.” The dismemberment of the mighty Roman empire, the subject of an ancient prediction, which however was not fulfilled till some time after the cessation of miraculous powers, is an argument for the truth and authority of the holy Scriptures, which

which is peculiarly addressed to us, and serves to bring the evidences, upon which our faith is founded at present, much nearer to an equality than the adversaries of revelation, in their hasty and inconsiderate hostility, are disposed to allow.

“ See then that ye refuse not him that speaketh; for if they escaped not which refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven.”

If a severe and heavy punishment attended the wilful rejection of the Mosaic law, how much more is it to be expected for them that despise the commandments of Christ, who came down from heaven to deliver them! That it is his voice which speaketh to us from heaven in the Gospel, we have every testimony that a reasonable and candid enquirer can demand, or that the state of the question can fairly be said to admit of. The more narrowly we search into the evidences of revelation (provided it be in that frame and temper of mind which is necessary to the discovery of truth, not, as the manner of some is, for the purpose of raising objections which may serve to excuse their

unbelief to themselves) the more firmly shall we be persuaded that Jesus Christ was indeed a teacher sent from God, and that the religion which he taught is closely and inseparably connected with the best and dearest interests of mankind. We live in an age perhaps the best fitted of any for prosecuting such an enquiry ; men are now better qualified, than at any preceding period, to estimate the weight of moral probabilities, and to determine their approximation to the very confines of demonstration. The evidences of Christianity have stood the severest scrutiny : fresh light has dawned upon this most interesting subject, and from quarters whence it was least expected ; and as science has been more successfully and more extensively cultivated, new traces have been discovered of that connection in which Christianity stands with the glory of God, and the welfare of his creatures.

Whatever difficulties lie in the way of our reception of the Gospel, there are infinitely more, and more stubborn ones, attending its rejection. Therefore it should seem somewhat astonishing, considering the great importance which Christianity at least claims
to

to be of to the everlasting happiness of mankind, that any one should profess himself an unbeliever, without having examined the subject in its fullest extent; without having applied to every accessible source of information, and carefully collecting, not merely the common-place objections of Infidel writers, but the solutions which the defenders of Christianity have given of them, and which the far greater part of mankind have admitted to be satisfactory. For the Gospel is no indifferent thing, which men may receive or reject, purely as it may suit their worldly feelings or carnal prejudices. We are called upon in an authoritative tone, to embrace it as the only foundation of our future hopes, the only appointed means of eternal salvation: we are threatened with everlasting destruction if we refuse the proffered boon of heaven; no middle way is left for us to escape in. Would it be safe therefore, would it be consistent with common prudence, that prudence upon which we act in the ordinary concerns of this life, to turn aside from the earnest and affectionate calls which are made to us in the Gospel of Christ, unless, what never has,

and we trust never can be done, its claims to divine origin and authority should be clearly demonstrated to be unfounded ?

Thus we have seen, that in every part of the government of God with which we are acquainted, all the operations of his power have been directed by wisdom and goodness. Clouds and darkness are about his throne, and his secret counsels the angels themselves desire in vain to look into. In regard to us, however, we can discover, by a careful use of those faculties which he has assigned us, the most evident traces of a great and beneficent plan for the improvement of mankind, which first began to operate at the fall of our great progenitor, and has continued to operate to the present day : advancing by slow, and at times hardly perceptible, degrees, yet still advancing, and all the accidents of the world, all the revolutions of states and empires, all the jarring passions and discordant interests of mankind, made to work together in assisting its progress. By attending to this consideration, we shall readily discover the futility of the objection frequently urged against Christianity, grounded upon the lateness of its appearance,

pearance, and its yet confined influence. The coming of Christ was as early, we contend, as, according to the plan of gradual improvement which the Almighty had determined upon from the beginning, was anywise necessary, and its progress since has been in strict conformity with the same rule. Christianity has already done much towards improving the human character: it is daily extending its genuine influence: there is every probability, says the excellent Paley, “that it may one day become
“universal, and that the world may con-
“tinue in that state so long, as that the
“duration of its complete reign may bear a
“vast proportion to the time of its partial
“influence.”

Indeed we live in a time of no common interest; when the circumstances of mankind are such, as to excite the most serious attention of the pious disciple of Christ. The moral world seems labouring with events of more than ordinary moment; its very foundations are out of course, and states and kingdoms appear to be convulsed to their very centre. Such events, as often as they have taken place in the his-
tory

tory of the world, have uniformly been, in their consequences, of great and lasting importance to the interests of God's Church, and the advancement of true Religion. And from this consideration, a ray of comfort and hope gleams through the dark and portentous clouds, with which our political horizon is at present encompassed. Many devout and intelligent Christians, who are deeply conversant in the Scriptures, and have been no inattentive observers of the scenes acting around them, profess a persuasion that the time is even now rapidly approaching, when the prophecies of Daniel and St. John respecting the dispensations of God in the latter days shall receive a complete accomplishment. According to them, the storms and tempests, which at present agitate the world, are the necessary forerunners of a season of unexampled serenity and brightness. The judgments of God, which he hath so plentifully poured out upon the sinful children of men, serve to prepare the way for a new and most sublime manifestation of his mercy. We are taught to look forward with confidence to the speedy overthrow of those
enemies

enemies which have so long and so cruelly vexed the mystical spouse of Christ: then she shall no longer be militant, but triumphant: the “whole earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the Lord,” and all mankind united together as “one fold, under one Shepherd, Jesus Christ the righteous.”

These indeed are lovely and ravishing prospects, and even the distant view of them dilates the heart of the believer with pious awe and holy rapture. But time alone can shew whether our hopes of their approaching realization are correctly founded. In the mean while let us remember that the duties which belong to us as the servants of Christ are precisely the same, at whatever distance we are placed from the final accomplishment of the all-gracious designs of our Heavenly Father. Let us be thankful for that great light, which really has been made to shine down upon us, and let us shew forth that thankfulness, by labouring most diligently in that vocation whereunto we are called, and by recommending the belief and practice of Christianity to all whom our exhortations

hortations can reach, or our daily conduct can influence. The day is coming, it is at no great distance from any of us, when this tremendous truth shall be more clearly understood ; when we shall be made to know more fully than the pride of our corrupt nature will allow us to do at present, that the most brilliant literary accomplishments, or the most extensive investigations of science, if not directed to secure and promote the interests of true Religion, shall be considered as less than nothing and vanity ; and that to have contributed in any one respect to extend the blessings of the Gospel ; to have assisted or directed its influence in any single instance ; to have strengthened one wavering disciple, or to have brought back to the sheepfold one who had gone astray, is of more real value than them all.

NOTES.

The first part of the paper is devoted to a general discussion of the problem. It is shown that the problem is of great importance in the theory of the structure of matter. The second part is devoted to a detailed analysis of the problem. It is shown that the problem is of great importance in the theory of the structure of matter. The third part is devoted to a detailed analysis of the problem. It is shown that the problem is of great importance in the theory of the structure of matter.

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NOTES.

P. 2. c. 19. *Genuineness of the book &c.*

“NOVI Testamenti Libri omnes sunt Canonici.
“Dubitatum tamen aliquando fuit de nonnullis; ut
“de secundâ Petri, secundâ et tertiâ Joannis, Epistolâ
“Judæ, Jacobi, ad Hebræos, et Apocalypsi Joannis;
“quia serius ad Ecclesiarum notitiam pervenerunt.
“Sed re diligentius exploratâ, compertum est esse ca-
“nonicos, et a viris divinis conscriptos.”

*Limborch, Theologia Christiana, Lib. i.
cap. 3. sec. 14.*

“The Apocalypse was not at all times, nor in all
“Churches, admitted as Canonical. *St. Jerom, Amphio-*
“*lochius*, and *Sulpitius Severus*, remark, that in their
“time many churches in *Greece* did not receive this
“book. It is not in the catalogue of the council of
“*Laodicea*, nor in that of *St. Cyril of Jerusalem*; but
“*Justin, Irenæus, Origen, Cyprian, Clemens of Alexan-*
“*dria, Tertullian*, and after them all the fathers of
“the fourth, fifth, and following centuries, quote the
“*Revelations* as a book in their time allowed to be
“canonical: from which we conclude that though it
“was long in establishing itself, yet at last it pre-
“vailed. Nevertheless some continued to reckon it
“among the books spoken against or *disputable*. The
“*Alogi*, the *Marcionites*, the *Cerdonians*, *Lutherans*, and
“others, have likewise rejected the *Revelations*; but
“even this proves, that it was generally received by
“the

“ the Catholic churches ; and Protestants themselves
 “ forsake Luther in this particular ; for Beza has
 “ strongly maintained against his objections, that the
 “ Apocalypse is authentic and Canonical.”

Calmet's Dictionary of the Bible, art. Apocalypsis.

The authenticity and divine inspiration of this, together with other parts of Scripture, have been called in question during the very severe controversies which have subsisted amongst Christians in modern times, upon the person and character of Jesus Christ. It was judged a very convenient method of attacking established doctrines, to fix the charge of spuriousness upon such books or texts of Scripture as appeared to give the strongest countenance to those doctrines. But there are others who have no objection to the peculiar doctrines of Christianity, and yet are not satisfied of the propriety of ranking the Revelations of St. John with the Canonical books. Such as these, if they be candid and unprejudiced, may have their doubts fully removed by a careful perusal of the ten excellent letters to the Rev. Herbert Marsh upon this subject. The anonymous author of those letters, in the view which he has taken of the question, has exhibited considerable acuteness, learning, and diligence. And from an impartial examination of the several evidences internal, as well as external, which he has produced, we are obliged to conclude with him, that the Apocalypse is an authentic book, a book of divine inspiration, and highly deserving of the place which it holds in the Canon of holy Scripture.

P. 9. l. 5. *Will be inclined to consider &c.*

“ The calamities of the times (the desolation of the
 “ Roman

“ Roman empire by the barbarous nations) produced
 “ still more pernicious effects upon the religious senti-
 “ ments of the Gauls. They introduced among that
 “ people the most desperate notions, and led many of
 “ them to reject the belief of a superintending provi-
 “ dence, and to exclude the Deity from the govern-
 “ ment of the universe.”

Mosheim's Eccles. Hist. Cent. v. Part 2. chap. 2.

P. 9. l. 26. *Alphonso X. of Castile &c.*

See Superville's Sermon, vol. i. “ Sur l'injustice des
 “ murmures contre la Providence.”

P. 17. l. 5. *And hence arose the strange and degrading
 doctrine &c.*

“ Whence come evils ? Whence so many inconve-
 “ niences in the work of a most good, most powerful
 “ God ? Whence that perpetual war between the very
 “ elements ; between animals, between men ? Whence
 “ errors, miseries, and vices, the constant companions
 “ of human life from its infancy ? Whence good to
 “ evil men, evil to the good ? If we behold any thing
 “ irregular in the works of men ; if any machine an-
 “ swer not the end it was made for ; if we find some-
 “ thing in it repugnant to itself or others, we attribute
 “ that to the ignorance, impotence, or malice of the
 “ workmen : but since these qualities have no place in
 “ God, how come they to have place in any thing ?
 “ Or why does God suffer his works to be deformed
 “ by them ?

“ This question has appeared so intricate and diffi-
 “ cult, that some, finding themselves unequal to the
 “ solution of it, have denied either that there is a God

“ at all, or at least, any author or governor of the
 “ world. Thus Epicurus and his adherents : nor does
 “ Lucretius bring any other reason for his denying the
 “ system of the world to be the effect of a Deity, than
 “ that it is so very faulty. Others judged it to be
 “ more agreeable to reason, to assign a double cause
 “ of things rather than none at all ; since it is the
 “ greatest absurdity in nature, to admit of actions and
 “ effects, without any agent and cause. These then
 “ perceiving a mixture of good and evil, and being
 “ fully persuaded that so many confusions and incon-
 “ sistencies could not proceed from a good Being, sup-
 “ posed a malevolent principle, or God, directly con-
 “ trary to the good one ; and thence derived corrup-
 “ tion and death, diseases, griefs, miseries, frauds,
 “ and villainies ; from the good Being nothing but
 “ good : nor did they imagine that contrariety and
 “ mischief could have any other origin, than an evil
 “ principle. This opinion was held by many of the
 “ ancients, by the Manicheans, Paulicians, and almost
 “ all the tribe of ancient Heretics.”

Abp. King on the Origin of Evil, Eng. Transl.
 chap. ii. sect. 3. and 4.

P. 25. l. 14. *When the barbarous nations desolated*
Rome &c.

At this awful period, the Christians in an especial
 degree were made to taste of the calamities of the times ;
 and this not so much from any particular previous
 hatred which the invaders bore to Christianity, as from
 the vile calumnies and wicked suggestions of the Pa-
 gans, who laid every calamity which befel the empire
 to the account of the Christians, as if the religion
 which

which they professed was peculiarly hostile to the quiet and happiness of mankind. But their sufferings were not of very long duration ; the prejudices excited against them soon disappeared ; for we read that the far greater part of the invaders embraced Christianity, and this circumstance amongst others contributed to extend the knowledge and the blessings of the Gospel to the uttermost parts of the earth. See Mosheim, Cent. v. Part 2. chap. 2.

P. 31. l. 18. *One of the most learned of my predecessors &c.*

The Rev. Dr. Eveleigh, Provost of Oriel College : His lectures contain an excellent summary of theological knowledge, and are one of our best introductions to theological study : they are with peculiar propriety dedicated to the use and improvement of the undergraduates of the University ; and as one of the number at the time, I take this opportunity of offering to the amiable author my most thankful acknowledgements. If the merit of any literary work is to be estimated by its usefulness, perhaps there are few performances which deserve a higher rank than the Bampton Lectures of 1792.

P. 38. l. 14. *Not only were no impediments to such a plan, but instruments of its advancement &c.*

“ All the great events which happen in the world
 “ have the same use as the dispensations recorded in
 “ the Scriptures, viz. that of being a course of moral
 “ discipline for nations and individuals, and of pre-
 “ paring the world for future dispensations. Thus the
 “ irruptions of the barbarous nations into the Roman
 “ empire,

“ empire, the Mahometan imposture, the corruptions
 “ of the Christian religion, the ignorance and darkness
 “ which reigned for some centuries during the grossest
 “ of these corruptions ; the reformation, restoration of
 “ letters, and the invention of printing, three great
 “ contemporary events which succeeded the dark
 “ times ; the rise of the enthusiastical sects since the
 “ Reformation, the vast increase and diffusion of learn-
 “ ing, the growing extensiveness of commerce between
 “ various nations, the great prevalence of infidelity
 “ amongst both Jews and Christians, the dispersion of
 “ Jews and Jesuits into all known parts of the world,
 “ &c. &c. are all events which, however mischievous
 “ some of them may seem to human wisdom, are,
 “ *cæteris manentibus*, the most proper and effectual way
 “ of hastening the kingdom of Christ and the re-
 “ novation of all things.”

Hartley on Man, vol. ii. p. 136.

P. 39. l. 18. *Rabbinical writers &c.*

Not only the Rabbins, but some of the earlier here-
 tics in the Christian Church, and the Mahometans, en-
 tertained very extravagant and visionary notions re-
 specting the endowments of Adam in Paradise. See
 Calmet in voc. *Adam* ; who seems himself somewhat
 inclined to the opinion that the father of mankind,
 whilst yet free from sin, might have possessed a degree
 of moral and intellectual happiness and perfection far
 beyond all human conception at present. But this is
 simple conjecture ; the Scriptures, our only sure guide
 in this case, give no countenance to the opinion : and
 we may conclude that the specific and extraordinary
 mental powers and attainments ascribed to Adam by
 less

less sober writers are entitled to much the same degree of credit with the Rabbinical dreams respecting his corporeal dimensions. "His stature, says R. Aha, was "from one end of the world to the other, and it was "for his transgression that the Creator laying his hand "upon him in anger lessened him; for before, says R. "Eleaza, he reached the firmament with his hand."

D'Israeli's Curiosities of Literature, art. Talmud.

"They who suppose Adam to be capable of deep "speculations, and to have exceeded all his posterity in "the subtilty and extent of his intellectual faculties, "have no foundation for this opinion in Scripture; "nor do they seem to consider, that innocence and "pure unmixed happiness may exist without any great "degrees of knowledge."

Hartley on Man, vol. i. p. 298.

P. 42. l. 6. *This covenant was obscurely hinted to Adam immediately after the fall &c.*

Adam could not at the time, neither was it intended that he should, understand the nature of that deliverance then promised to his descendants, nor the particular character and office of the deliverer himself. The Almighty, addressing the author of that tremendous mischief which had just been wrought, says, "The seed "of the woman shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt "bruise his heel." This, like every other Scriptural prophecy, could only be completely interpreted by the event: to Adam it must have been, as to its specific meaning, altogether unintelligible; but to us, who are acquainted with the glorious event which was thus darkly foretold, it wants no explanation. In the heel of the woman's seed we clearly discern the humanity

or inferior nature of Christ, which was bruised by the Serpent when our Redeemer, as man, was sacrificed for us; and by the same event was the head of the Serpent, i. e. his power and dominion, broken in pieces. Still however, from the words of this prophecy, Adam must have gathered some notices of a future deliverance, however faint and distant.

“ If we suppose our first parents to understand these
 “ words literally, and that God meant them to be so
 “ understood, this passage must appear absolutely ridi-
 “ culous. Do but imagine that you see God coming
 “ to judge the offenders; Adam and Eve before him
 “ in the utmost distress; that you hear God inflicting
 “ pains and sorrows, and miseries, and death, upon the
 “ first of the human race; and that, in the midst of all
 “ this scene of woe and great calamity, you hear God
 “ foretelling with great solemnity a very trivial acci-
 “ dent, that should sometimes happen in the world :
 “ that serpents would be apt to bite men by the heels,
 “ and that men would be apt to revenge themselves
 “ by striking them on the head. In the name of God,
 “ what has this trifle to do with the loss of mankind,
 “ with the corruption of the moral and natural world,
 “ and the ruin of all the glory and happiness of the
 “ creation ! Great comfort it was to Adam, after tell-
 “ ing him that his days shall be short and full of
 “ misery, and his end without hope, to let him know
 “ that he should now and then knock a snake on the
 “ head; but not even that without paying dear for
 “ his poor victory, for the snake should often bite him
 “ by the heel. Adam surely could not understand
 “ this prophecy in this sense, though some of his sons
 “ have so understood it; a plain indication how much
 “ more

“ more some men are concerned to maintain a literal
 “ interpretation of Scripture, than to make it speak
 “ common sense.”

Dean Sherlock's Use and Intent of Prophecy,
 Disc. iii.

P. 52. l. 4. *It is the remark of an intelligent writer &c.*

See Bishop Law “ on the several dispensations of Revealed Religion.” I have in some measure followed the steps of this excellent writer, whom it was impossible to desert entirely, in the sketch which is here given of God’s dealings with mankind, from the creation to the coming of Christ.

P. 53. l. 17. *Divine interposition at the tower of Babel &c.*

“ The confusion of languages, the consequent dispersion of mankind, and the shortening of the lives of the postdiluvians, all concurred to check the enormous growth and infection of wickedness. And we may judge how necessary these checks were, from the great idolatry and corruption which appeared in the world, within less than a thousand years after the Flood.”

Hartley on Man, vol. ii. p. 130.

P. 53. l. 19. *Name of Peleg &c.*

The word Peleg in Hebrew signifies to *divide*, or *separate*. Some writers have therefore supposed the son of Eber to have been thus called, prophetically, from the great dispersion which was to happen in his days. (See Shuckford, vol. i. b. v. p. 353 &c.) Others again, founding their opinion on Genesis x. 25. have assigned as a reason, the division of the earth amongst

the descendants of Noah, which took place about the time of his birth. But there are difficulties which attend connecting the name of Peleg with either of those circumstances. See Calmet in voc.

P. 58. l. 13. *Jewish traditions &c.*

It is said that Terah the father of Abraham was a maker of idols, thence called in the Hebrew “Tera-
“phim.” The better sense of Abraham forbade him to bow down to the work of men’s hands, and on this account he was very harshly treated by his father and the rulers of his country. See more of this in Calmet, and in Bayle’s Dictionary, art. *Terah*.

Perhaps no great degree of credit is due to these traditions; but they serve to shew the high estimation in which the character of Abraham has always been held in the East.

P. 60. l. 8. *That the Almighty should suffer his
people &c.*

See Ryan’s Essay on Religion, vol. ii. and the notes to White’s Lectures, p. 2.

P. 64. l. 7. *Shepherd Kings &c.*

See Atwood’s “Literary Antiquities of Greece,” Calmet in voc. *Shepherd*: but Maurice in his “Indian Antiquities” has thrown the most light upon this subject, and from him has the above statement been taken.

P. 64. l. 21. *Their frequent captivities &c.*

“ — Let us briefly consider the state of the Gentile
“ world

“ world in the interval between Abraham and Christ,
“ and what intimations the Old Testament gives us of
“ their being also under the care of Providence, and
“ in a state of moral discipline. They had then ac-
“ cording to this, First, the traditions of patriarchal
“ revelations. Secondly, all the nations in the neigh-
“ bourhood of Canaan had frequent opportunities and
“ motives to inform themselves of the true religion.
“ Thirdly, *all those who conquer them at any time could*
“ *not but learn something both from their subjection and*
“ *their deliverance afterwards. Fourthly, the captivities*
“ *by Salmaneser and Nebuchadnezzar carried the know-*
“ *ledge of the true God to many distant nations.* Lastly,
“ the distractions of the Jewish state, during the con-
“ temporary empires of Syria and Egypt, the rise of
“ the Samaritan religion, and the translation of the
“ Old Testament into Greek, conduced eminently to
“ the same purpose. And as it is necessary in the
“ present state of things, for the exercise of various
“ affections, and our moral improvement, that there
“ should be degrees and subordinations in common
“ things; so it seems equally necessary that it should
“ be so in religious matters: and thus the Gentiles
“ may have had, in the interval between Abraham
“ and Christ, all that suited their other circumstances,
“ all that they could have improved by internal vo-
“ luntary purity, other things remaining the same,
“ which is always supposed. And it is remarkable in
“ the view of this proposition, that we learn so much
“ from the Scriptures concerning the moral discipline
“ which God afforded to the Gentiles.”

Hartley on Man, vol. ii. p. 134.

P. 66. 1. 3. *They are introduced by the prophets &c.*
See particularly Jeremiah xl. 2, 3. 1. 7.

P. 71. 1. 13. *If language be the gift of God &c.*

Even Hobbes could say God taught Adam this useful invention. *Leviathan*, c. 4.

See the admirable remarks of Dr. Johnson on this subject. *Boswell's Life of Johnson*, vol. ii. p. 460.

That both the language and the primary notices of religion were, and could only be, derived from the Creator's immediate communication, are points very ably vindicated by Dr. Ellis in his "Enquiry whence cometh wisdom and understanding to man," inserted in vol. i. of the *Scholar Armed*.

P. 74. 1. 5. *And the discussion is closed &c.*

"Hæc cum essent dicta, ita discessimus, ut Velleio Cottæ disputatio verior, mihi Balbi ad veritatis similitudinem videretur esse propensior."

Cicero de Naturâ Deorum, p. ult.

P. 81. 1. 7. *Mingled among the heathen &c.*

"Satis è jam dictis liquet Israelitas in Ægypto viventes lethalem superstitionis Ægyptiacæ succum et loliginem imbibisse, eosque (ut fit) dominorum suorum mandatis et moribus se pariter attemperâsse. Nec minus è Scripturâ liquet, eos, cum in desertis oberrarent, multum è moribus Ægypti retinuisse; quamvis Deus in eorum redemptione ex Ægypto tam illustria dedisset bonitatis et potentiæ suæ documenta. Cum itaque Israelitæ idololatriæ morbo miserè adeò laborarent, Deo visum est (ut iis medelam faceret) multa media exerceri, nullo ævo cognita, et
"quæ

“quæ fide majora viderentur, nisi quod benignissimo
 “numini mos sit, *sua omnia pro variâ temporum condi-*
 “*tione, ad humani generis commodum administrare.*”

Spencer de Leg. Hebræorum, lib. i. cap. i. sec. 2.

P. 85. l. 15. *To keep them stedfast in the belief of the
 divine unity and spirituality &c.*

“In viewing the ancient history of the Jews, we
 “cannot but take notice of this as a remarkable cir-
 “cumstance, by which they are distinguished, that ido-
 “latry, which prevailed so much among the rest of
 “mankind, was forbidden in their law. All nations,
 “however they might differ in other respects in their
 “institutions and manners, agreed in serving false
 “gods; polytheism was universally professed and
 “established by public authority: we find that among
 “the Jews alone it was prohibited under the se-
 “verest penalties, and that the worship of the one
 “true God was rigorously enjoined.”

Craven's Discourses, p. 1.

P. 83. l. 26. “*Excellent Divine.*”

See Saurin's Sermon on the “Uniformity of God's
 “Government,” vol. iii. Robinson's translation. I
 have availed myself of many of this learned writer's
 remarks upon the general subject of these lectures, and
 have endeavoured to give them a degree of extension,
 which, being confined to the limits of a single discourse,
 he could not so conveniently do himself.

P. 87. l. 12. *The more learned Jews were not unac-*
quainted with this doctrine &c.

“It cannot be denied that some of the ancient Jews,
 “who

“ who lived before Jesus Christ, and those also who
 “ lived in his time, were ignorant of the mystery of
 “ the holy Trinity ; which yet is so clearly revealed in
 “ the Old Testament, that it could not be unknown to
 “ the patriarchs, the prophets, and the enlightened of
 “ the ancient Hebrews. Raymond, Martin, Gelatine,
 “ and others, have undertaken to shew, that the Chal-
 “ dee Paraphrasts, and the ancient Rabbins, have made
 “ express mention of the Trinity ; i. e. of three divine
 “ Persons : and we do certainly find in their writings
 “ the words *Sbali sbith*, שלישית, which signifies Trinity ;
 “ and *Memar*, מומר, the Word ; and *Ruach Hakkado-*
 “ *shab*, רוח הקדש, the holy Spirit. We also find *God*
 “ *the Father, God the Son, and God the holy Ghost.*
 “ Lastly, שלשה באחד, *Three in one,*
 “ *and one in three ;* also *Jehovah*, to express the Father ;
 “ *Memra-Jah*, to express the word of the Father ;
 “ and *Shechinah*, to express the Holy Ghost.

“ It is true, modern Rabbins disclaim part of the
 “ books in which these words are found, maintaining
 “ that they were not written by Jews : others they
 “ explain in another sense ; and they not only do not
 “ acknowledge a Trinity, but they expressly deny it,
 “ and declare against it ; either because they have de-
 “ parted from the sentiments of their forefathers ; or
 “ that their antipathy and hatred to Christians has
 “ excited them to dispute this truth, which is so
 “ clearly revealed by Christ and his apostles : or, that
 “ this mystery, from the beginning, was unknown to
 “ the generality of the Jews, and the people had but a
 “ very imperfect idea of it. *Indeed the conceptions of*
 “ *the Jews were so very gross, and they were so little*
 “ *acquainted with abstract speculations, that from the be-*
 “ *lief*

*“ lief of the Trinity it would have been very easy to
 “ them to have passed to that of the plurality of gods.
 “ For which reason, perhaps, the wisdom of God might
 “ withhold from them the plain discovery of this mystery.”*

Calmet in voc. Trinity.

P. 102. l. 17. *Omission of future rewards and punishments &c.*

It is justly to be feared that a considerable portion of mankind, even of such as profess and call themselves Christians, are determined in their moral conduct, chiefly if not entirely, by motives of a temporal nature. Such as these in the hardness of their heart, and the obtuseness of their intellect, resemble the Jews under the dispensation of Moses; and therefore civil restrictions, the dread of temporal and immediate punishment, are almost the only means of keeping them in any tolerable subjection to the regulations of civil society. The Gospel of Christ, although its sanctions are principally founded in the future and eternal consequences of men's conduct in this life, by no means omits to urge present and temporal motives to obedience. “ Godliness,” saith the Apostle, “ is profitable above all things, having the promise of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come.” Divines therefore in their public exhortations act evangelically, as well as prudently, when, in addition to the great and glorious rewards which the Almighty has appointed to virtuous conduct in the world to come, they occasionally enlarge upon the less important, though to some characters the more captivating encouragements derived from the prospect of temporal convenience and prosperity.

P. 104.

P. 104. l. 16. *No eternal rewards or punishments could be dispensed to a nation collectively &c.*

Abraham interceding with God for the accursed cities, upon the supposition that some virtuous persons might be found in them, says "Wilt thou at this time destroy the righteous with the wicked? That be far from thee." Men could not at that time reconcile such a mode of proceeding with the notions they had been led to form of the divine justice and benevolence. Now the Christian philosopher at present considers the temporal calamities which a nation at large, the overthrow and desolation of states and kingdoms, as immediate visitations from God on account of "the wickedness of them that dwell therein." In these cases it cannot be but that some few righteous at least will be involved in the punishment of the wicked. But they who have truly "learned Christ" have learned also to reconcile these things with the goodness of their heavenly Father: they consider them as trials of their spiritual strength, as means graciously held out to quicken them in their Christian course, to purify them from the world, and to fit them for heaven. They reckon the very heaviest calamities, which, on account of the general depravity of those amongst whom their lot is cast, they are made to taste equally with them, as "not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall afterwards be revealed in themselves."

P. 113. l. 26. *There must be forms, and places, and seasons of religious worship &c.*

"The form of religion may indeed be where there is little of the thing itself; but the thing itself cannot be preserved amongst mankind without the form."

“ form. And this form frequently occurring in some
 “ instance or other of it, will be a frequent admonition
 “ to bad men to repent, and to good men to grow
 “ better, and also be the means of their doing so.

* * * * *

“ It is with respect to religion—as in the common
 “ affairs of life, in which many things of great conse-
 “ quence intended are yet never done at all, because
 “ they may be done at any time, and in any manner ;
 “ which would not be, were some determinate time
 “ and manner voluntarily fixed upon for the doing
 “ them. Particular rules and directions then concern-
 “ ing the times and circumstances of performing ac-
 “ knowledged duties, bring religion nearer to practice ;
 “ and such as are really proper and cannot well be
 “ mistaken, and are easily observed.—Such particular
 “ rules in religion, prudently recommended, would
 “ have an influence upon the people.”

Bp. Butler's Charge to the Clergy of Durham, 1751.

The justice of these remarks in the present circumstances of human nature, we should think no reasonable person would be inclined to question ; and yet it was on account of them, and others of a similar tendency, that this pious and learned Prelate was basely calumniated after his death, and represented as an abetter of the worst corruptions that have been charged upon Popery, viz. putting external observances in the place of internal purity and holiness. See Halifax's Preface to the Analogy.

P. 114. l. 24. “ *Our fathers worshipped in this mountain*” &c.

“ *Iste est locus dilectus (super eum sit pax) de quo*
 “ *dixit*

“dixit Dominus; *Cum transiveritis Jordanum, erigētis lapides istos quos ego præcipio vobis hodie, in monte Gerizim &c.*”

Epistola Sichemitarum ad Job. Ludolfum, (Latinè reddita) p. 1.

It is a circumstance worthy of being more generally known, that within the distance of little more than a century from this time, some descendants of the Old Samaritans were residing in the land of their remote forefathers, and perhaps may still be found there. Translations of their epistles to the great Orientalist Job Ludolf, and to their supposed brethren in England, have been published, and from thence we learn that they kept inviolably the law of Moses, and performed their devotions in Mount Gerizim. The remarks of Ludolf on this interesting fact deserve to be repeated :

“Cæterum non sine singulari Dei providentiâ factum videtur, quod manipulus iste Samaritanorum post tot bella, persecutiones, et excidia, hucusque conservatus fuerit, ut si scelesto cuidam Atheo in mentem venerit, Judæos Pentateuchum ex cerebro fortè suo confinxisse, hic contemplaretur Samaritas, illorum adversarios, ejusdem antiquitatis, quâ nulla antiquior est testis; ejusdemque Legis authenticæ observatores.”

Præfatio ad Epist. Samar.

P. 115. 1. 5. *Implacable enmity between the Jews and Samaritans &c.*

“Fuit tamen aliquando, cum Garezimitanum templum
“Δι’ Ἑλληνικῶν, Jovi Græcanico, ab ipsis Samaritanis per-
“mitteretur, ut illâ vel simulatione vel defectione de-
“clinarent Antiochi acerbitem, quam Judæi per-
“pessi

“ peſſi fuerant. (Joſeph. Antiq. l. 7. cap. 7.) Ex mu-
 “ tatâ religionis et divini cultus fede, *implacabile odium*
 “ *inter Judæos et Samaritanos exortum eſt*, quod indies
 “ eo magis crevit quo plures ex Judæis ad Samaritanos,
 “ male ſibi conſcii, perſugiebant; hinc mutuæ ob-
 “ trectationes et calumniæ, ut perditiffimum quemque
 “ mortalium *Samaritam* appellarent Judæi, qui longius
 “ inde ab Ezræ temporibus originem hujus odii ar-
 “ ceſſunt.” *Chriſt. Cellarii Colleſtanea Hiſtoriæ Sama-*
ritanæ, ſec. 7.

P. 116. l. 7. *Half idolatrous obſervances &c.*

This epithet muſt be underſtood with ſome degree of reſerve, as regarding rather the character of Samaritan worſhip in ages paſt, than as it ſtood at that time. The Samaritans being Cuthites, ſent by the kings of Aſſyria to people the kingdom of Samaria, were originally idolaters; and, after receiving the law of Moſes, they ſtill continued to worſhip their idols in conjunction with the God of Iſrael. But it is contended, that idolatrous worſhip had now for ſome time ceaſed among them, as among the Jews, after the return from the captivity of Babylon; and this opinion is chiefly founded upon the ſilence of Scripture reſpecting any ſuch practices among them after that period, though it pointedly reproaches them with many other tranſgreſſions. But the fact mentioned above reſpecting their temple is a proof that they retained their idolatrous propenſities to a much later period, or at leaſt that they were not unwilling, from motives of temporal convenience, to profeſs a reverence for the fictitious deities of the heathens.

P. 116. l. 9. *The haughty Philosopher.*

“ Nothing but stupidity, or the most frivolous diffi-
 “ pation of thought, can make even the inconsiderate
 “ forget the supreme importance of every thing which
 “ relates to the expectation of a future existence.
 “ Whilst the infidel mocks at the superstitions of the
 “ vulgar, insults over their credulous fears, their
 “ childish errors, or fantastic rites, it does not occur to
 “ him to observe, that the most preposterous device, by
 “ which the weakest devotee ever believed he was
 “ securing the happiness of a future life, is more ratio-
 “ nal, than unconcern about it. Upon this subject no-
 “ thing is so absurd as indifference—no folly so con-
 “ temptible as thoughtlessness and levity.” *Paley’s*
Moral and Political Philosophy, b. iv. c. 9.

P. 117. l. 17. *Animal sacrifice.*

“ Since offering sacrifices to God was one of the
 “ most ancient rites of religion of which we have any
 “ account ; since it obtained early and universally, not
 “ only among polytheists and idolaters, but among the
 “ most religious adorers of the one true God ; this
 “ naturally leads us to conclude that it was a part of
 “ the primitive religion originally enjoined to the first
 “ ancestors of the human race, and by them transmitted
 “ to their descendants.” *Leland’s View of the Deistical*
Writers, vol. ii. p. 206.

With regard to the Mosaic sacrifices, they are con- sidered by some as having been originally borrowed from the Heathens, and afterwards *permitted* to the Jews, in compliance with their prejudices. Now, without enumerating other difficulties with which this opinion is attended, it is plain that the Israelites could

not have learned animal sacrifice from the Egyptians ; for these nourished and worshipped calves, rams, goats, and other animals usually slain in sacrifice ; and therefore the Israelites dared not to sacrifice in the sight of the Egyptians.—See Exod. viii. 26. directly to this point. With the idolatrous nations of Canaan they had no intercourse for some time after the promulgation of the Mosaic Law : and they were afterwards enjoined not to imitate them in their sacrifices, and were punished when they did so. They were indeed idolaters whilst they continued in Egypt, (Ezekiel xxxiii. 3.) but after the same manner as the Egyptians. The worship of the golden calf is a sufficient instance of this.

P. 122. l. 12. *Typical of that great sacrifice.*

The Jews, according to Josephus, had a tradition, that the outer part of the tabernacle and temple represented the world, or the mundane system ; and the holy of holies, heaven, the more immediate and peculiar residence of God. Following this idea, according to that system which bids us consider the law as being a shadow of substantial benefits to come, it should seem that the sacrifices which were offered without the tabernacle and temple represented what Christ did upon earth when he expiated the sins of mankind by his death ; and that what was done by the High Priest alone, within the holy place, was intended to prefigure that intercession which our Redeemer is making for us at the right hand of the Father in Heaven.

P. 124. l. 19. *Evident traces of the same design.*

The Jewish polity differed from that of any other people

people in a variety of circumstances, but in none more than in the disregard enjoined them of the usual means of national defence and security. In the book of Deuteronomy the future king of the Israelites is forbidden to multiply to himself chariots and horses; and the prophet Isaiah denounces woe against the Jewish rulers who should in the day of peril seek for safety in foreign connections, or put any confidence in the help of man. Surely this would have been arbitrary and cruel, had they not been assured that the help of God would at all times be afforded them, on their duly entreating for it. Again, the order, that every male should at three stated periods in the year go up to Jerusalem to worship, was, humanly speaking, calculated to leave the land of Judæa exposed to every injury and insult from the jealous hostility of the neighbouring states. But the Almighty had assured them, (Exod. xxxiv. 24.) that during these seasons their country should be safe from hostile incursions; and their subsequent history proves that they had every reason for confiding in this assurance: nor, when they went forth to battle, under every possible disadvantage, yet trusting alone in the name of the Lord, did they at any time find their confidence misplaced. These circumstances, though the Israelites improved them not as they ought, were admirably well calculated to impress them with a constant sense of their immediate dependance upon their heavenly Sovereign.

P. 129. l. 11. *Considering how closely &c.*

See Doddridge's Expositor. Luke i. 25.

P. 134.

P. 134. l. 17. *Such a reference has been satisfactorily made out.*

By Spencer in his learned and elaborate work “de Legibus Hebræorum.” See more particularly chapters vii. viii. ix. xi. of Book II.

P. 144. l. 15. *Christian philosophers at this day.*

The testimony of an eminent philosopher (Sir J. Pringle) is very direct to this point. In the earlier part of his life he had been an unbeliever; but maturer years, and an impartial and thorough investigation of the question, had produced in him a complete conviction of the truth of Christianity. “I have been” (said he) “for many years Professor of this pretended science, (Ethics;) I had ransacked the libraries and my own brain to discover the foundations of it: but the more I sought to persuade and convince my pupils, the less confidence I began to have myself in what I was teaching them; so that at length I gave up my profession, and returned to medicine, which had been the first object of my studies. I have nevertheless continued from that time to examine every thing that appeared upon this subject, which I could never explain or teach, so as to produce conviction: but at length I have given up the point, most thoroughly assured that, without an express divine sanction attached to the laws of morality, and without positive laws, accompanied with determinate and urgent motives, men will never be convinced that they ought to submit to any such code, nor agree among themselves concerning it. From that time I have never read any work upon morality but *the Bible*, and I
“return

“return to that always with fresh delight.” *De Luc on the Religious Education of Children.* Letter 4.

P. 166, l. 4. *It is a favourite opinion with some writers &c.*

See Bishop Downname's Preface to “Exposition of the Decalogue.”

P. 170. l. 4. *The duty of chastity.*

“We Christians, who live in the more adult ages of mankind, have stricter precepts, and are obliged to higher degrees of spirituality, as we approach nearer to the spiritual kingdom of Christ; and yet some permissions are suitable to our state. No wonder then that larger permissions were requisite in the gross, corporeal, infant state of mankind, considered as one individual tending ever from carnality to spirituality, in a manner analogous to that of each person. However these were only permissions to the Jews and Patriarchs, not commands.”

Hartley on Man, vol. ii. p. 234.

P. 179. l. 13. *Has been to the unbelievers a ground of objection &c.*

That “the contemporaries of Moses and Joshua had beheld with careless indifference the most amazing miracles,” is a remark of Gibbon; and considering the spirit of hostility to the cause of Revelation which he manifests in many parts of his history, it is not unfair to consider him in this place as insinuating a suspicion of the reality of those miracles, from their not producing those effects, which at this day we should conceive to be necessarily consequent upon them.

But

But it is not true that the Israelites were thus insensible to these sublime displays of divine power. They were at the time awed by them into feelings of devout thankfulness and veneration: that these feelings were merely transient, that they were not improved by them into settled habits of piety and obedience, is a circumstance which is best explained by the faintness and imbecillity of the human character at this early period. We have a similar instance of this author's dissingenuousness in another part of his elaborate history: "The laws of nature (says he) were perpetually suspended for the benefit of the Church: but the sages of Greece and Rome turned aside from the awful spectacle." Now from hence what are we to infer, but that the miracles which ushered in Christianity, and were continued for a considerable time afterward, as necessary helps to its advancement, made no sort of impression upon the wiser and more learned part of the Heathen world. But we read in Scripture of a great multitude of heathens, and amongst them men of cultivated talents, who were far from being indifferent spectators of the divine power thus wonderfully exercised. And in after-times we have the Christian writers appealing in a strain of honest exultation, from the calumnies of their enemies, to the illustrious characters in every description of learning, who from the first had embraced the profession of the Gospel from a conviction of its being the work of God, and who considered the hopes of immortality through Christ as being cheaply purchased by the loss of every worldly comfort, and the endurance of every worldly pain. *See Jerome de Illust. Eccles. Script. Arnobius con. Gen. l. II.*

P. 222. l. 5. *The principal event to which the ancient prophets refer, is the coming of Christ &c.*

There is something very acute and original in the remarks of Dr. Jortin on this subject. “There are, it
 “may be, a hundred different passages in the Old
 “Testament relating to some person, whoever he be,
 “one or more, and to certain considerable changes
 “which should happen in the world. Christians say
 “that they relate to Christ, and some of them are pro-
 “duced in these discourses. He who would see more
 “may consult Fabricius *De Ver. Chr. Rel.* p. 569. and
 “Huet’s *Dem. Evan.* prop. 7. History, sacred and pro-
 “fane, ancient and modern, will furnish us with a
 “variety of heroes, kings, warriors, philosophers, and
 “illustrious persons. If we endeavour to apply these
 “passages in the Old Testament to any one of these
 “great men, for example to Judas Maccabæus, to
 “Confucius, to Socrates, to Solon, to Numa, to Sci-
 “pio Africanus, to Augustus Cæsar, &c. we imme-
 “diately see that it is a vain attempt; that three
 “fourths of them are nowise suitable to his character
 “and his deeds; and that it is easy to select many
 “single ones amongst them, which cannot possibly be
 “adapted to him. If we apply them to Christ, and to
 “the religion established by him, a surprising corre-
 “spondence immediately appears.

“To ascribe these coincidences to chance, is to give
 “a very poor and unsatisfactory account of them. He
 “who can believe that chance produced them, ought
 “not to object credulity to Christians.”

Discourses on the Truth of the Christian Religion,
 p. 177. (Note.)

As the world advances in civilization and science, the better will the genuine character of Christianity be known and appreciated : and consequently the more will the ancient prophecies of the coming of Christ be elucidated, and the application which we make of them justified, by the effects which that coming really has produced in the world.

P. 237. l. 8. *A late noble writer &c.*

Lord Chesterfield. See the anecdote in Jones's life of Bishop Horne amongst the extracts from the Bishop's Common-place book, at the end.

P. 241. l. 15. *Their long lost Canaan shall be restored to them &c.*

Every thing favours the idea of the Jews being one day restored to the possession of Palestine. The prophecies of the Old Testament respecting the great blessings, both temporal and spiritual, which they should enjoy after their return from captivity, have never been as yet correctly fulfilled. For these blessings were not bestowed upon them in the interval between the reign of Cyrus, and the destruction of their city and national polity by the Romans ; and ever since they have experienced a continued series of hardships and calamities. The prophets, also, who wrote subsequent to their return from Babylon, speak of a future restoration in language similar to that used by those who preceded : it should seem therefore that the predictions of both are to be referred to some restoration or deliverance, which is yet to come.

Further, the Jews are to be found in every part of the civilized world, and every where a distinct and se-

parate people; they are in habits of correspondence with their brethren, however dispersed; they are for the most part acquainted with the language of their forefathers, as well as of the different nations amongst whom they are found; their property is of a kind most easily transportable; they are treated in general with contempt and insult by the rest of mankind; and they themselves entertain strong hopes of being once more restored to their ancient country. All these are circumstances, which, in a secondary point of view, may assist the accomplishment of that great event here spoken of.

Infidels may sneer at the difficulties which would attend this gathering up of the people of Israel, scattered as they have been through every part of the globe, and the traces of some of them to our apprehensions lost; as is the case with the ten tribes carried away by Salmaneser, which returned not from that captivity, but which we suppose will partake in the promises made to the rest of Abraham's descendants. It was thus that the Sadducees objected to the doctrine of the resurrection, from their not being able to comprehend the manner in which it was to be effected. The pointed rebuke of our blessed Lord is applicable to both: "Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God."

That the Jews thus dispersed should yet continue a separate and unmixed people, is to the full as extraordinary and miraculous as that they should hereafter be restored to the land of their forefathers; and the one circumstance is best explained by referring it, and considering it as preparatory to, the other.

FINIS.



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